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HOW **WELLNESS TOURISM** IS TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE TRAVEL

CHECKING IN, ZONING OUT

ASIA'S BEST SPAS
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FLYING COLOURS
10 EXCITING NEW DIRECT DESTINATIONS

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CONTENTS

JULY-AUGUST 2025

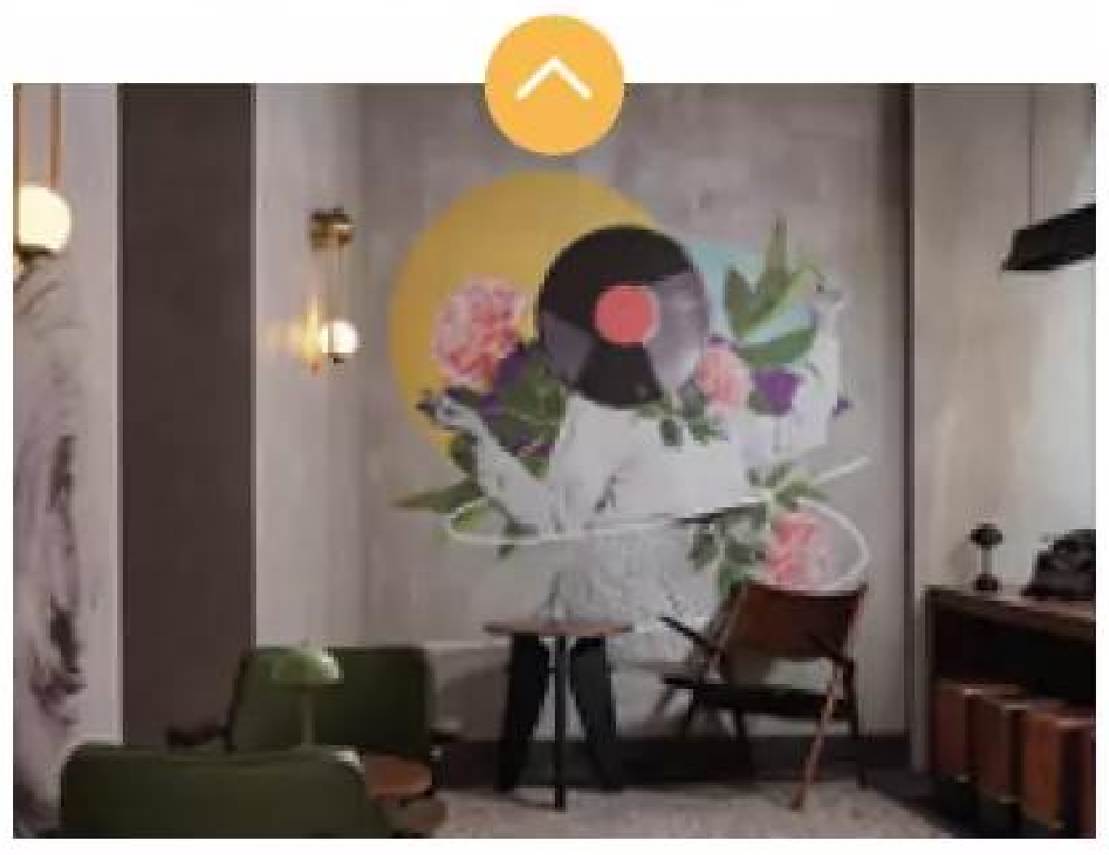
Dispatch

07
- **07** Hot Ticket: TOURISE
- **08** Regional News: The latest airline, hotel, and travel news
- **10** Sustainable Traveller: The greener side of tourism and hospitality
- **12** Global News: An update on international travel

Insight

15
- **15** We chat with Patrick Woodhead, CEO and founder of White Desert

- **19** A conversation with stunt woman and frequent traveller Chelsea Mather
- **21** Op-Ed: The Rise of Travel as a Service in the GCC
- **22** Frequent flyer with Takashi Kudo, a member of teamLab
- **23** Elevator Pitch with Cent Alakurt, General Manager of the new Moxy Istanbul Taksim



38
CHECKING IN, ZONING OUT
How wellness tourism is transforming the way we travel

Explore

25
- **25** 24 hours in the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro
- **28** Our guide to fun regional summer hotel deals
- **30** The emergence of wellness social clubs and the UK's first floating sauna
- **32** Smart mirrors, innovative spa treatments and garments for cold water swimming
- **34** Splash out on luxury experiences and products
- **35** Our pick of cultural events around the world and inflight entertainment

48

Features

43
Soulful Sojourns
From mini-moons to maxi-moons and more, milestone-driven breaks aren't just for classic romance anymore

46
First impressions
We investigate British Airways' new first class seat, set to take to the skies in 2026

48
The Art of Wellness
Execs requiring a little TLC need look no further than Asia's first-class spa resorts

54
With Flying Colours
The region's airlines are adding exciting new routes to their networks. Here are some that are on our radar

Reviews

61
- **61** Anantara Layan Phuket Resort
- **63** Heritage Grand Perast by Rixos
- **64** Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, The Palm, Dubai
- **65** Mausam, Downtown Dubai

61

Postcard

66
The SAY 52 sportsboat is a carbon fibre masterpiece

COVER IMAGE **DOUGAL WATERS/GETTY IMAGES**
CONTENTS IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

◆ Editor's Letter

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU FELT WELL-RESTED? I mean genuinely restored – where your shoulders aren't hunched up by your ears, your jaw isn't slightly clenched, you're breathing with your full lungs, and your body doesn't feel like a vehicle that can only operate when fuel (in this case, coffee) is poured in. When your mind isn't racing with thoughts at a breakneck pace, but it's processing both the internal and the external at your natural rhythm, with a sense of calmness and peace. And as a result, you feel bright-eyed, sharp, and focused, full of energy and vigour – in a way where your hopes, dreams, and ideas can come to life.

I am a proponent of the idea that to be truly well, one must take a 360-degree approach to one's health – where mind, body, and spirit are each nourished, so that the physical and non-physical can come closer to a state of not just surviving, or existing, but being in equilibrium... at times, thriving. And it is something that must be constantly maintained on some level. Not in a way that is punishing, but rather, one that evolves with us through the different phases of life. Even nature mimics these patterns, with the cycles of day and night, and the changing of seasons.

It is, essentially, a much more nuanced version of the saying "work hard, play hard" – with the very important addition to also "rest and recover hard" (even if that might sound like an oxymoron). It is also one of the reasons why travel – and everything that comes with it – is often so intrinsic to this state of well-being. Even before wellness became one of the largest-growing industries in the tourism sector (predicted to be worth US$1.35 trillion by 2028, rising from an already-impressive US$637 billion and upwards in 2022), intentional travel has long been a means of fostering physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Learning about new cultures stimulates the mind and expands perspectives. Spending time in beautiful natural environments is deeply healing. And allowing ourselves the time and space to play, relax, and enjoy life without the nagging worries of the day-to-day can help us unwind and return to ourselves. The memories made during our travels can warm the heart and leave us forever changed, for the better – and in this increasingly fast-paced world, it can often act as a necessary reset, so that we don't lose ourselves in the grind.

Whether you're hitting the global marathon circuit or investing in your longevity (p.38), releasing your inner child or your creativity (p.22 & 46), exploring thrilling new destinations that will restore your sense of wonder (p.15 & 54), recovering with a soothing spa and wellness getaway (p.48 & 61), escaping to a hidden gem with an unhurried pace of life (p.26), sinking into an easygoing staycation (p.64), indulging in a bit of luxury (p.34), or just taking a time-out at home while dreaming up your next trip, 'tis the season to slow down, take stock of the year so far, and let yourself enjoy some of the reasons why we work so hard in the first place – before coming back feeling truly ready to tackle a new season.

Enjoy the issue, and see you in September!

Yi-Hwa Hanna

Yi-Hwa Hanna
Editor

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MOTIVATE MEDIA GROUP
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OBAID HUMAID AL TAYER
MANAGING PARTNER AND GROUP EDITOR IAN FAIRSERVICE
CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER ANTHONY MILNE

EDITOR YI-HWA HANNA
ART DIRECTOR CLARKWIN CRUZ
EDITORIAL CO-ORDINATOR LONDRESA FLORES

CONTRIBUTORS
HANNAH BRANDLER, LAUREL IVES, VIVIENNE TANG

GENERAL MANAGER – PRODUCTION S SUNIL KUMAR
PRODUCTION MANAGER BINU PURANDARAN
ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER VENITA PINTO

GROUP SALES MANAGER CHAITALI KHIMJI
SENIOR PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER MURALI NARAYANAN

BUSINESS TRAVELLER MEDIA LTD.
MANAGING DIRECTOR JULIAN GREGORY
GROUP PUBLISHER RANIA APTHORPE

MOTIVATE MEDIA GROUP

HEAD OFFICE: MEDIA ONE TOWER, DUBAI MEDIA CITY, PO BOX 2331, DUBAI, UAE; TEL: +971 4 427 3000; FAX: +971 4 428 2266; E-MAIL: BTME@MOTIVATE.AE

DUBAI MEDIA CITY: SD 2-94, 2ND FLOOR, BUILDING 2, DUBAI, UAE; TEL: +971 4 390 3550; FAX +971 4 390 4845

ABU DHABI: PO BOX 43072, ABU DHABI, UAE; TEL: +971 2 677 2005; FAX: +971 2 657 3401; EMAIL: MOTIVATE-ADH@MOTIVATE.AE

SAUDI ARABIA: REGUS OFFICES NO. 455 - 456, 4TH FLOOR, HAMAD TOWER, KING FAHAD ROAD, AL OLAYA, RIYADH, KSA;TEL: +966 11 834 3595 / +966 11 834 3596; EMAIL: MOTIVATE@MOTIVATE.AE

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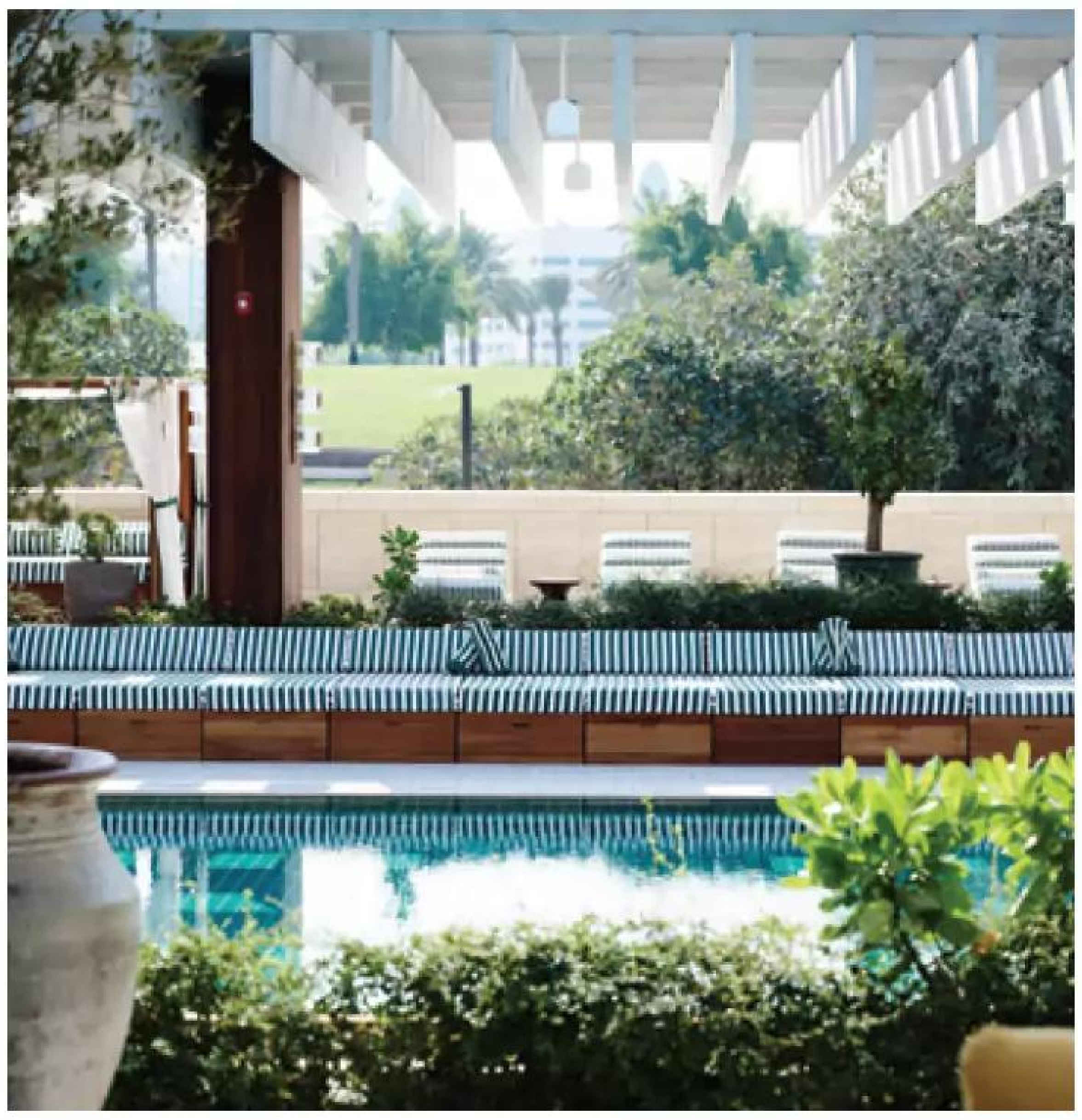

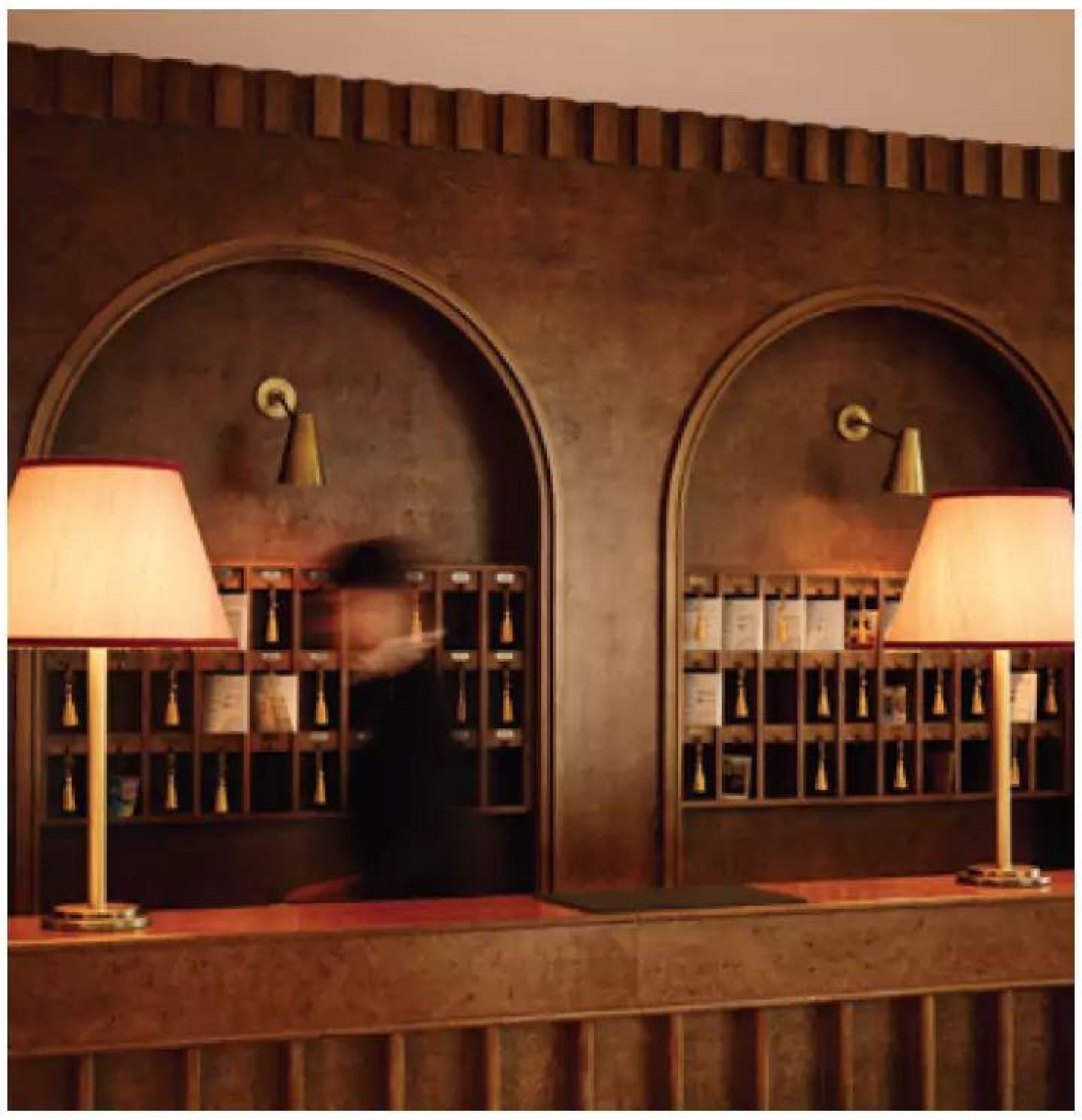

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SUSTAINABILITY
The greener side of tourism & hospitality

GLOBAL NEWS
Happenings from around the world

Dispatch

The latest business travel updates

HOT TICKET

A new way to rise

A new global authority on travel has launched to define tourism excellence

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

TOURISE, A NEW platform headquartered out of Riyadh and powered by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Tourism, will act as a global authority, with the goal of defining excellence in tourism. TOURISE will also run the TOURISE Awards, a new initiative that aims to recognise top destinations across the world. Nominations for five categories are open to the public through 9 July, with winners to be announced at the first-ever TOURISE Summit in Riyadh from 11-13 November. Applicable for cities, regions, and cultural sites, categories include Best Adventure Destination, Best Shopping Destination, Best Arts & Culture Destination, Best Food & Culinary Destination, and Best Entertainment Destination. A sixth flagship category, Best Overall Destination, will be decided by a panel of judges made up of experts from the international travel and tourism, fashion, culture, gastronomy, and design industries.

IMAGE **MATTHEW STARLING/GETTY IMAGES**

Do-Re-Mi...

WHEN FAMED Arab pop star Amr Diab teams up with a leading UAE lifestyle developer that champions cutting-edge technology, the result is bound to be an impressive offering – and that's the case with DO Hotels & Residences Dubai. Described as "the region's first AI-powered, music-themed boutique hotel under the ONE/AD brand," the property will have an as-yet-undisclosed number of hotel rooms, and residences including 70 Sky Villas. It will offer panoramic sea views, with the residences and hotel both offering full hospitality services, as well as a set of wellness facilities, an infinity pool, an all-day dining restaurant, co-working spaces, a multi-purpose court, and, in keeping with its musical theme, two recording studios, and a fully AI-integrated system.

NEW CO-WORKING SPACE

CLOUD SPACES, one of the UAE's leading providers of flexible, fully-furnished workspaces, has opened a new location in Downtown Dubai, at Dubai Mall Fountain Views. With direct access to the mall (and Burj Khalifa views), it's situated on the mezzanine floor of the building, across a 3,762+ sqm space. Inside, you'll find private offices, semi-private offices, podcast studios, meeting rooms, and collaborative co-working lounges. It also has an auditorium, and a pool table. Those who are members can enjoy concierge-level service and premium amenities, with access to its community. A "Cloud Desk" costs Dhs1,695 a month, with free parking and secure wifi, and 24/7 access included in the package. "Cloud Cubicles" are available from Dhs2,200 a month, "Cloud Bubbles" from Dhs2,300 a month, "Cloud Suites" from Dhs8,600 a month, and "Premium Suites" from Dhs11,250 a month. Day passes are also available for guests, from Dhs120 per day.

NEW HOTEL ALERT

Egypt is set to welcome a bold new addition to its hospitality scene with the arrival of the country's first 25hours Hotel. A partnership between Majid Al Futtaim (MAF) and lifestyle hospitality group Ennismore, it will be located at Junction, MAF's flagship business and lifestyle destination that is currently under development in West Cairo. The hotel will feature 250 keys, with a mix of hotel rooms and 25hours HEIMAT residences. Guests and residents will have access to three dining concepts, co-working spaces, event areas, and various services.

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

Transport that's wired differently

GLOBAL CHAUFFEUR service Blacklane has partnered with renowned advanced electric vehicle maker Lucid Group, to expand their offering of sustainable, premium transportation solutions across Saudi. Lucid's vehicle lineup will be integrated into Blacklane's chauffeur service platform across the country. The partnership will support Blacklane in doubling operations in the region by the end of 2025, including significantly expanding services in key cities like Riyadh and Jeddah. Lucid and Blacklane will also work together to support the rollout of EV charging infrastructure in the region. As part of the partnership, Lucid will also adopt Blacklane as the company's chauffeur partner of choice in various cities across Saudi Arabia. The Lucid Air sedan is now already available to Blacklane guests. The Lucid Gravity SUV will be added as an option later this year, as the rollout of the new SUV intensifies.

Arriving with a lot of Moxie

WELCOME THE PLAYER

MARRIOTT'S playful Moxy Hotels brand has made its first entry into Türkiye with the opening of the Moxy Istanbul Beyoğlu. Located in one of the city's most vibrant cultural quarters, it aims to offer guests a stylish, community-driven hub that blends bold, youthful design with a well-connected location – which boasts easy access to some of the city's top cultural and historical attractions, such as Taksim Square and Istiklal Avenue, as well as Hagia Sophia and Topkapi Palace, and plenty of street food haunts and contemporary art galleries. The hotel merges neoclassical architecture with modern, industrial-chic interiors — full of colourful accents, tactile materials, and quirky, locally-inspired artwork. References to Turkish cinema add a sense of place, while rich wood and sleek leather finishes create a comfortable, lounge-worthy atmosphere. It will feature 167 rooms and suites, which can be checked into from Bar Moxy, the heart of its social scene.

ROUTE ROUND-UP

WARSAW
ABU DHABI

Etihad Airways has launched two new flights this month: to the Czech capital of Prague as of 2 June, and to Warsaw, Poland as of 3 June. The two new routes are among the 16 new destinations being added to the UAE carrier's global network this year. Both services will be operated on the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, featuring 28 Business Studios (each transforming into a fully-flat bed with direct aisle access) and 262 Economy Smart seats.

WYNDHAM
flypgs.com

Pegasus Airlines has teamed up with Wyndham Hotels & Resorts to give Wyndham Rewards members the option to convert their points into Pegasus BolPoints, thanks to a new partnership between the two. Wyndham is the largest international hotel company in Türkiye, and Pegasus is the country's leading low-cost carrier. Once converted, the points can be exchanged for flights, seat selection, extra baggage, or even sent to other members.

Air Astana has launched a direct flight from Atyrau to Tbilisi, in an effort to boost air connectivity between western Kazakhstan and Georgia. The new service, which launched on 27 May, will operate three times a week on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. With a flight time of just under two hours, it is expected to be popular with both leisure tourists and business travellers. This new route is the fifth international service operated by Air Astana from western Kazakhstan.

Emirates has made Bahrain the first all-A350 destination in its network. The UAE carrier deployed a third Airbus A350 on its Bahrain route last month, now exclusively serving the kingdom with the aircraft, as part of its fleet modernisation programme, and as part of Emirates' broader strategy to elevate the customer experience under its 'Fly Better' brand promise, while gradually introducing its newest aircraft across short- and medium-haul routes.

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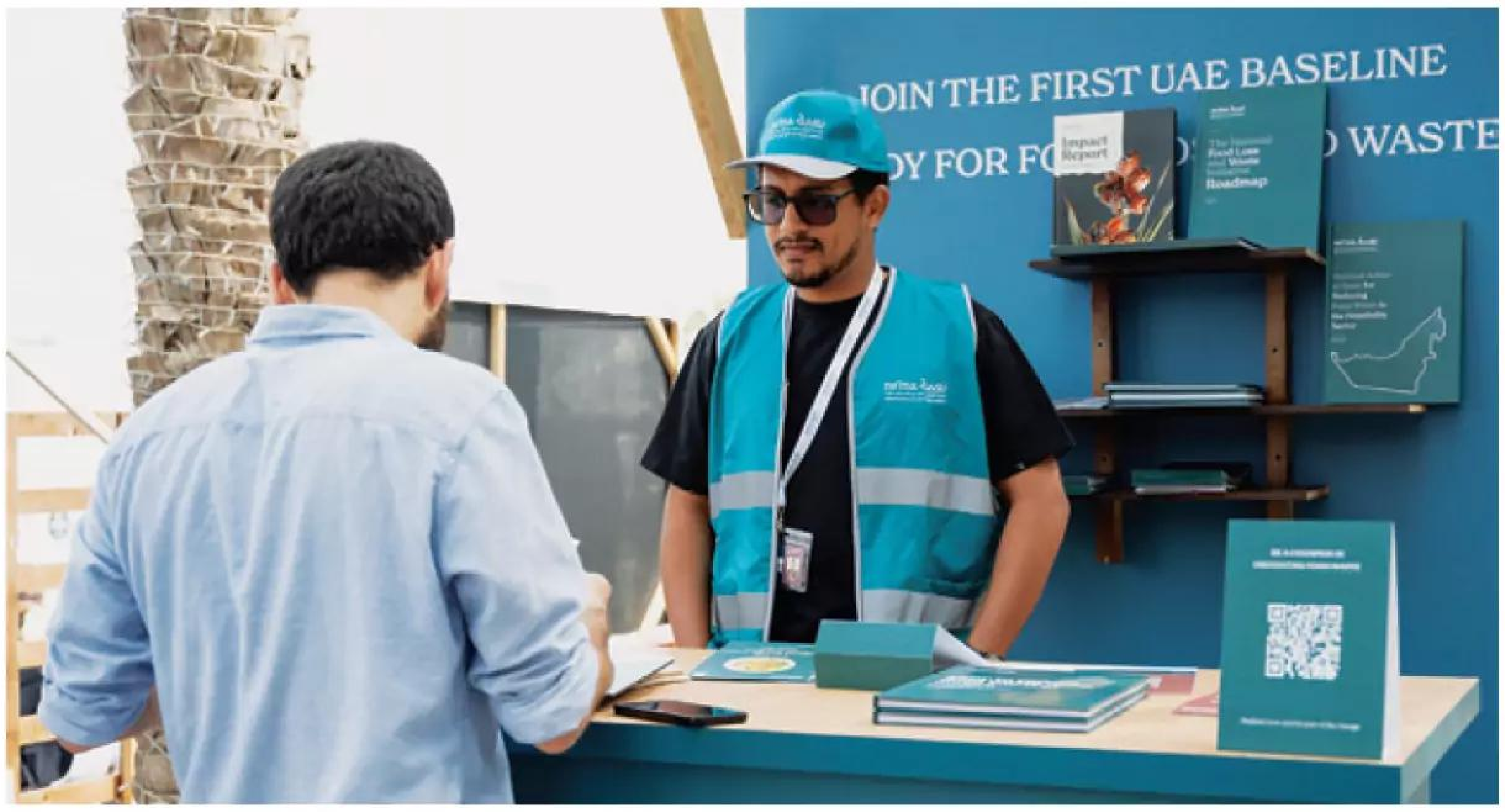
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For a better tomorrow

A first-of-its-kind study addresses food waste across all sectors in the UAE, including hospitality

LED BY NE'MA - the National Food Loss and Waste Initiative – supported by the UAE Restaurant Group (UAERG), and backed by a coalition of hospitality leaders, including HAMA MEA and the Dubai Hotel Group, the country's first Food Loss and Waste Baseline Study will measure and collect real data across the value chain. The goal? To create actionable insights that can drive meaningful progress, and empower businesses to adopt unified measurement tools and best practices for reducing food loss and waste, in line with the country's sustainable development goals. UAERG was originally founded in 2020 as the Dubai Restaurant Group, and beyond championing the UAE as a global dining destination par excellence, it also plays a key role in supporting innovation, sustainability, and sector-wide growth. This new study is intended to help form the foundation of evidence-based action and long-term progress, and build a more resilient and responsible hospitality ecosystem.

50%
THE AMOUNT THAT THE UAE WOULD LIKE TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE BY 2030

A whale of a time

QATAR TOURISM has relaunched its Whale Shark tours for the 2025 season. Running since June through September, tours are operated on a premium catamaran led by expert marine guides. The sharks feed in the waters of Al Shaheen Marine Zone, 2.5 hours from Ruwais Port. Since 2022, the tours have welcomed 1,200+ guests, with sightings of over 600 whale sharks during a single excursion.

DID YOU KNOW?
As per Qatar Tourism, Qatar's northern waters host one of the world's largest aggregations of whale sharks. The tours aim to promote ecotourism and the sharks' conservation, and are supported by key entities from Qatar's private and public sector, including Qatar Airways. The tours are operated by Discover Qatar.

NOVOTEL
SUITES
NOVOTEL

Restore, engage, and trace

NOVOTEL – a hotel brand committed to ocean preservation – has partnered with UAE-founded global traceability company Seafood Souq for a two-year commitment that will see a Seafood Souq audit implemented across 19 Novotel properties in the GCC. As a result, Novotel is dedicated to ensuring that all seafood served in its hotels has undergone this comprehensive audit for traceability, with 100% of its sourcing and supply chains being verified for transparency in its sustainability efforts. The Seafood Souq collaboration supports both companies' efforts to eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing practices. The hotel brand also recently unveiled its first Oceans Impact Report, on the first anniversary of its transformative Ocean Positive Impact Plan, and its three-year partnership with the World Wildlife Fund.

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GET THE SCOOP

The latest updates in the travel industry from across the world

1 SkyTeam unveils refurbished Vancouver lounge

(Above) The 528 sqm facility at Vancouver International Airport originally opened in 2017, and was the first and currently only SkyTeam lounge in North America. Near gate 53 in the west wing of the airport's International Concourse D, it's accessible to SkyTeam Elite Plus members, as well as first and business class passengers. The refurbished lounge features "a refreshed modern design, upgraded furniture and an updated layout".

2 Capital One unveils flagship lounge at New York JFK

(Right) The 1,250 sqm lounge, located with New York JFK's Terminal 4, features a Central Park-inspired dining area and Manhattan-style bar, with a centrepiece hanging glass sculpture by Brooklyn-based Shakuff Custom Lighting, and more than 40 original works by New York-based artists. The credit card provider has also partnered with Manhattan-based Murray's Cheese to offer guests a cheesemonger experience.

3 Zedwell to open windowless hotel close to Tower of London

(Left) The 200-room Zedwell Tower Bridge will be housed within Mansell Court, a former office building on Mansell Street close to the Tower of London and Aldgate, Aldgate East, Fenchurch Street and Tower Hill stations. It will be the group's second property in the city. The brand is known for its windowless rooms or 'cocoons', which also feature noise-reducing walls, floors, and doors, and ambient lighting "to create an optimal environment for rest and relaxation".

4 ITA Airways unveils renovated 'Runway Lounge' in Milan

(Below) ITA Airways has opened its refurbished lounge at Milan Linate Airport, located close to gates A17 and A21. The 482 sqm Runway Lounge has seating for 125 guests, with areas for dining, work, and relaxation. Features include a Silent Room housed behind a replica aircraft fuselage with Poltrona Frau's Jay Lounge chaise longues, as well as designer Archibald and Martha armchairs. ITA has partnered with Campari Group to showcase the Italian spirit with a Campari Wall and signature Runway Shakerato cocktail, while the bar also serves Italian coffee brand illycaffè.

ITA
AIRWAYS

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WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA,
MARK CASWELL,
HANNAH BRANDLER

5 Uber launches limited-edition helicopter and boat charter services on Amalfi Coast

(Below) As part of its "Go Anywhere" campaign, this summer Uber is offering private helicopter rides or boat trips in the Italian hotspot. The Uber Copter – a private, dual-engine, dual-pilot helicopter – will launch in Sorrento, departing from an exclusive helipad there for transfers between Sorrento and Capri. The service must be pre-booked, and can offer groups of up to six people a luxurious day trip to Capri for €250 per head – with Uber car transfers included, to and from the helipad available anywhere along the Amalfi Coast. Uber Boat will set sail from Sorrento Marina, offering private charters for up to 12 people, with a four-hour cruise along the coastline in a stylish Italian Gozzo 35 boat. Each trip comes with its own personal skipper and complimentary snacks and beverages. The Uber Boat is currently free to book as long as availability is confirmed. Both are already available to book via Uber Reserve from anywhere in Italy, with reservations needing to be placed a minimum of 48 hours in advance. The services will run every Saturday and Sunday from 26 July to 24 August.

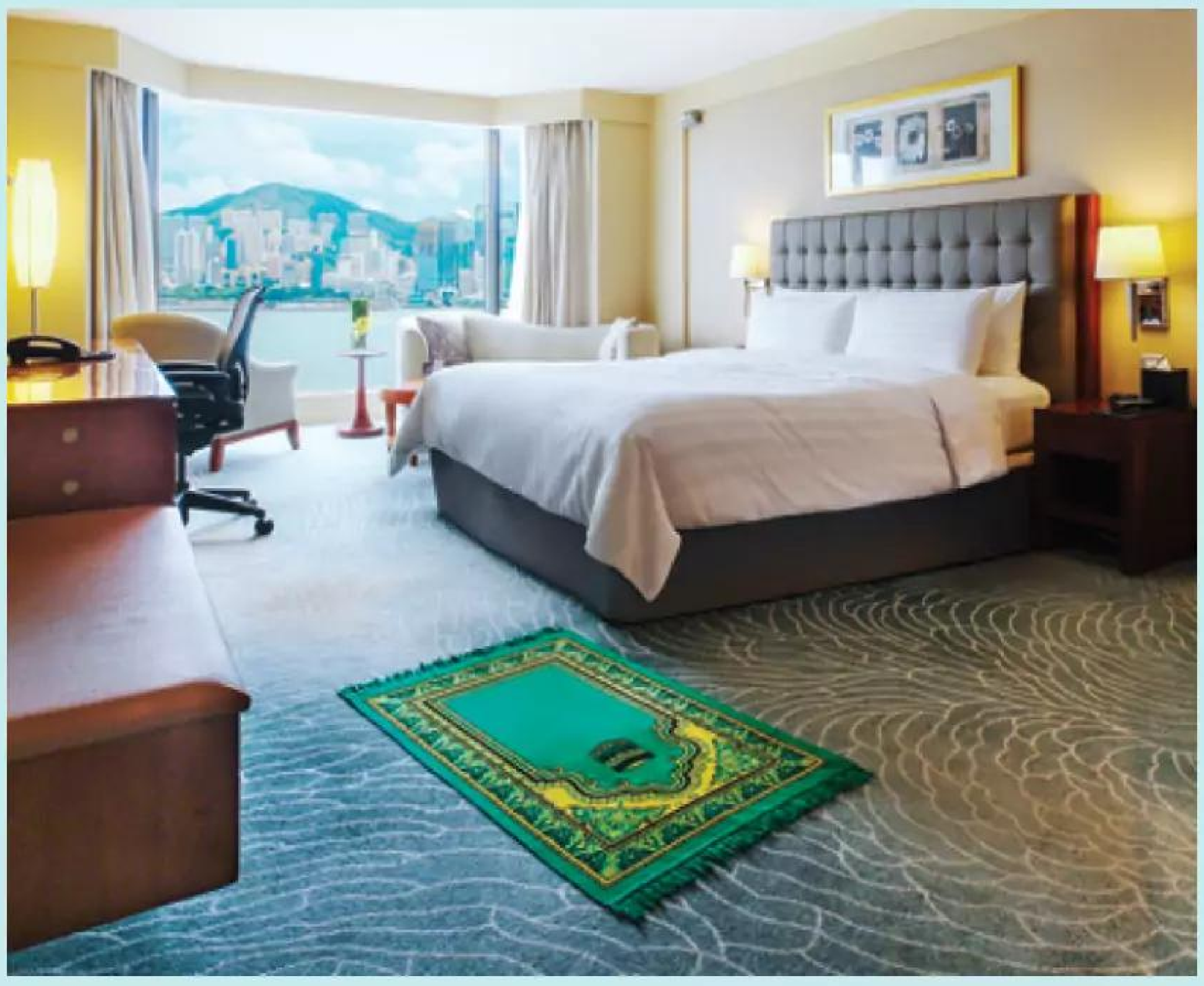
6 Hong Kong hotels recognised for Muslim-friendliness

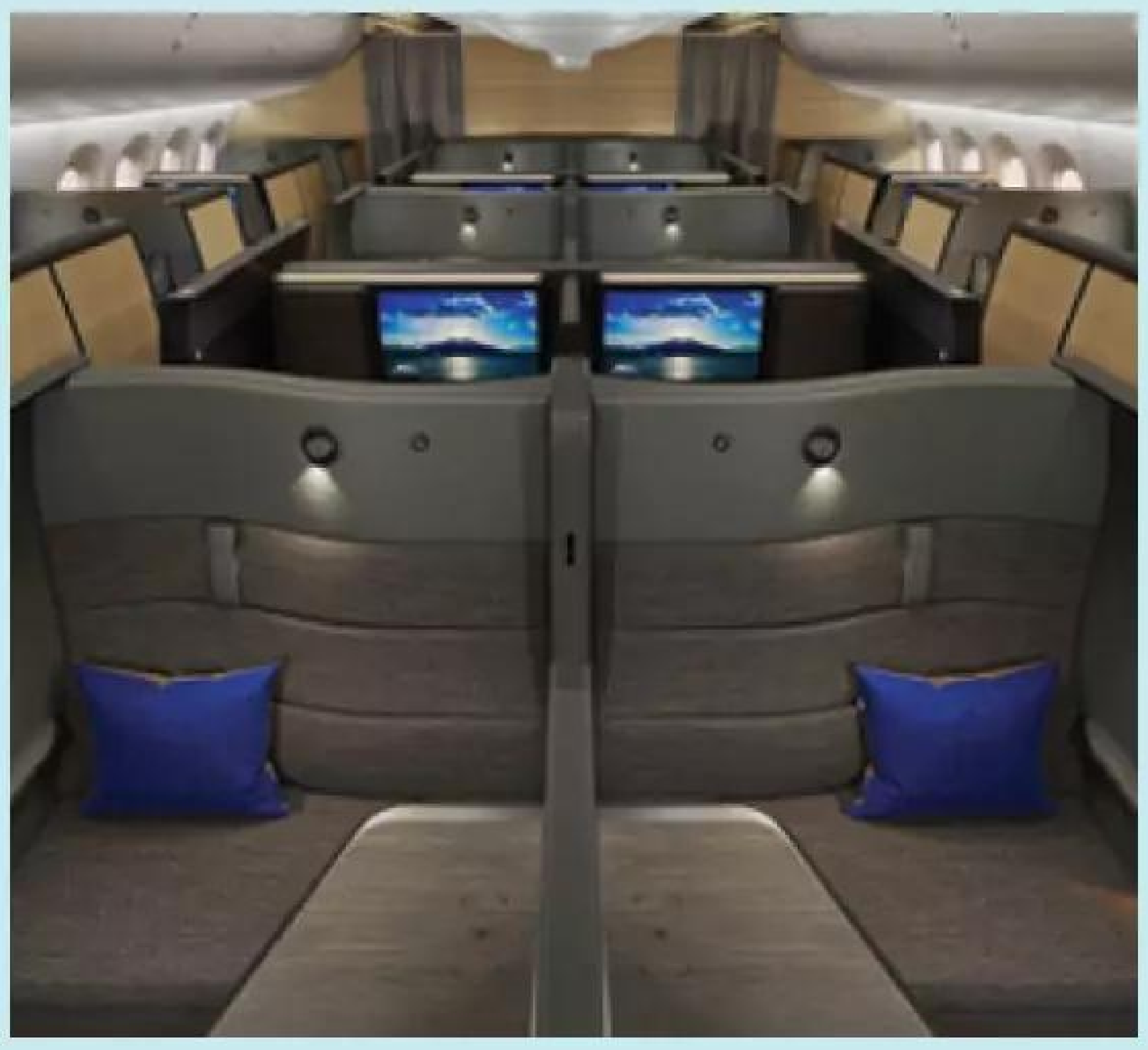
(Right) Island Shangri-La, Kowloon Shangri-La and Kerry Hotel, Hong Kong have now both been awarded a "Crescent Rating "of five. The rating is based on a standardised and independent accreditation system that offers global recognition for a property that boasts "Muslim-friendly hospitality", meeting specific standards and needs for Muslim travellers from across the world. This includes extensive Halal dining options, specific in-room features such as Qibla directional signs, a copy of the Quran, prayer mats, and more.

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

7 UAE's Agon Capital to open ultra-luxury Maldivian resort

(Above) The UAE-based investment firm has announced Villivaru Island Resort in the Maldives, a design-led escape aiming to redefine barefoot luxury. Created in partnership with Janah International Holding, under the newly-created Villivaru Holdings, the private island resort will be located just 30 minutes by speedboat from Malé's Velana International Airport, with 61 villas and 11 private island estates encompassing overwater villas and beachfront retreat, and ten dining venues. The residences will each have their own private arrival pavilion, spa, and sunset bar.





8 All Nippon Airways unveils new 787-9 business class seat

(Above) ANA has unveiled "THE Room FX", its next-generation business class seat with privacy doors, to be installed on the carrier's Boeing 787-9 fleet. The world's largest seat in its class on a mid-sized aircraft, it will be a 'no-recline seat' (similar to Finnair's latest generation long-haul business class product). Instead, it features a pre-reclining function that transforms the backrest into a sofa-like configuration, allowing passengers to relax in a variety of positions similar to lounging on a living room sofa. If required, adjustable leg rests allow the sofa-like configuration to be converted into a bed. Beginning in 2026, the Japanese Star Alliance member says it will gradually roll out "THE Room FX" business class on major 787-9 long-haul routes.

Gulf Business
AWARDS 2025

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Insight

Expert opinions on the future of travel

On the road less travelled

Yi-Hwa Hanna chats with **Patrick Woodhead**, CEO and founder of White Desert. The company fosters adventure travel through expeditions to the Antarctic, and beyond - most recently, to South America's Amazonian cloud forests, Atacama Desert, the Torres del Paine, and everything in between

Q&A

Tell us about White Desert. What inspired you to start it?
As a teenager, I was inspired by Sir Ranulph Fiennes' speech at the Royal Geographical Society, fuelling my desire for an extraordinary life filled with polar expeditions. After leaving university without a clear path, I embarked on a decade of expeditions, earning world records in Antarctica in 2002 and 2004.

The idea originated during an expedition in 2004, where we traversed the entire continent of Antarctica. [The 2000-km traverse] was hard and cold, and we were stuck in a tent. We dreamt about luxury accommodation, heated rooms, and of course, amazing food. We just thought, wouldn't it be extraordinary for other people to see the interior of Antarctica? A place seen by fewer than 800 tourists a year – to put that in context, more people try to climb Everest each year!

You're a world record-breaking polar explorer. Can you tell us about your achievement?
In all honesty, it's never been about breaking records. It's been about going somewhere unmapped or doing something totally new. It just happens that this process often involves doing some kind of "first," which can lead to breaking a record.

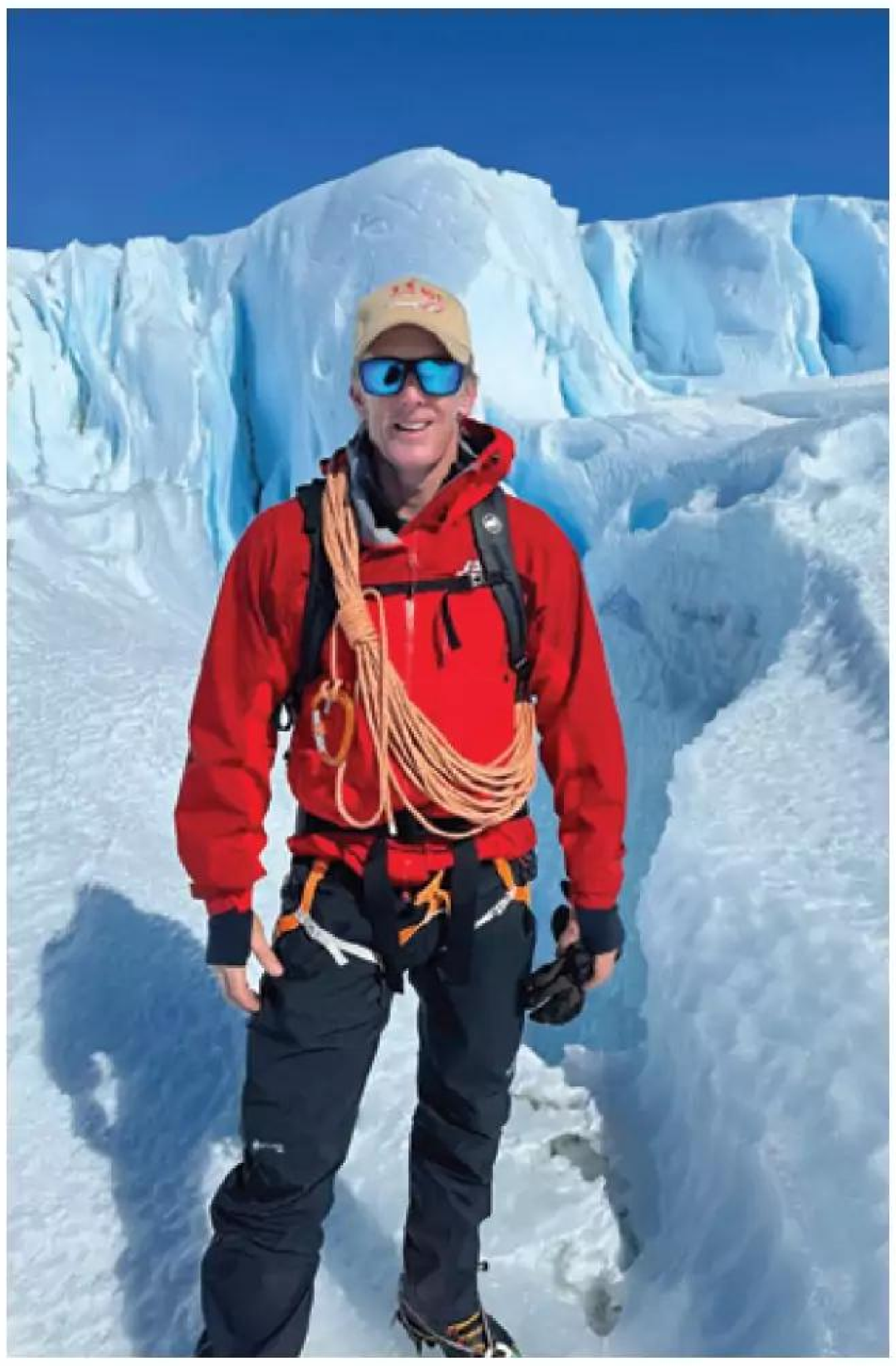
Do you think a sense of adventure and a resilient mindset are innate, or that they can be learned?
I believe resilience is absolutely something you can develop. Adventure, perhaps, is more innate – that curiosity about what's beyond the next ridge. But the mental toughness required for extreme environments? That's built through experience and deliberate practice. Every expedition I've been on has taught me something about managing fear, pushing through discomfort, and making decisions under pressure. The key is starting small and progressively challenging yourself.

You also have a private plane licence. Why did you pursue this, and what has flying taught you?
There are several pilots in the Woodhead bloodline, but the inspiration came from my grandfather, who flew for the Royal Air Force during WW2, and also my father, who got his aerobatics licence at the age of 78! Learning to fly gave me another tool for exploration, and another perspective on adventure. There's something magical about scouting new routes from a completely different vantage point.

The parallels between flying and polar exploration are remarkable. Both require you to read conditions constantly, make quick decisions based on incomplete information, and have multiple backup plans. But what surprised me most was how flying taught me about patience. In polar exploration, you can muscle through some situations with sheer determination. In aviation, you learn to respect the conditions absolutely - you wait for the right weather, the right visibility, the right moment. That discipline has made me a better expedition leader.

So – why Antarctica?
I've now been travelling to the continent for over 20 years. Antarctica has an almost otherworldly beauty that I want more visitors to discover for themselves. Most people are familiar with the images of the icebergs and rocky shores of Antarctica's coastline; however, they are completely unaware

→



BIOGRAPHY

Patrick Woodhead is the CEO of White Desert Antarctica. Part of the youngest and fastest team to ever reach the South Pole in 2002, in 2004 he led the first-ever East to West traverse of Antarctica, covering 1,850km in a total of 75 days. A fellow of the UK's Royal Geographical Society, he is part of "a community of explorers, researchers, and adventurers who are all pushing the boundaries in their areas of expertise."

IMAGES WHITE DESERT

Continued from overleaf

of the interior's strikingly varied landscapes – from the shimmering ice tunnels and iridescent blue ice waves to the imposing, jagged mountains rising from the ice sheet. There is nowhere else on the planet that encompasses the sense of freedom, staggering beauty and isolation of Antarctica - it has had a deep and lasting impact on me. Our guests decide to come to Antarctica for many different reasons; to be inspired, to stand at the bottom of the world, to view the incredible wildlife of the Emperor Penguins – it's as varied as we are as humans.

White Desert's trips are made up of relatively small groups. Why is it important to you to keep it intimate?
[It allows] for a more private, tailored approach that ensures everyone can participate in all activities. It also means you can feel like an actual explorer and achieve those serendipitous moments of discovery. With only 12 guests per trip, the impact on the surrounding environment is significantly reduced compared to the crowd mentality of passenger ships.

Your itineraries can be as relaxed, or as adrenaline-fuelled as a guest wishes. What might one of each of these look like?
A relaxed Antarctica experience can involve a stay at either of our luxury camps. Guests can observe emperor penguins up close, take gentle walks across the glaciers and through the cathedral-like blue ice tunnels, enjoy gourmet meals prepared by our chef, or simply absorb the profound beauty and silence of the continent from the sanctuary of one of our clear wellness domes.

On the more exciting side, we take our guests ice climbing and ziplining on the surrounding nunataks, descend into ice caves covered with geodesic crystals, and of course flying to the South Pole across the high polar plateau. The beauty is that we can calibrate the adventure level precisely to what each guest wants to experience.

One of your selling points is that the company is founded by genuine polar explorers. Why is authenticity is so important?
In an age where anyone can create an online presence and claim expertise, authenticity cuts through the noise. When someone is trusting you with their safety in one of the most dangerous environments on Earth, they need to know you've been there, faced the challenges, and learned from them. Our credibility isn't built on marketing – it's built on two decades of operating in one of the most inhospitable places on the planet. More importantly, knowing our product intimately enables us to share not just the Instagram-worthy moments but also the deeper transformations that occur in these environments. We understand the psychological journey our guests go through because we've been through it ourselves.

Experiential travel is on the rise. Why do you think it's becoming so popular?
People are craving authentic experiences and are increasingly seeking deeper connections with destinations they visit. As popular destinations around the world start to feel the brunt of overtourism, travellers are seeking opportunities for learning and personal growth, where they can leave a place better off than it was when they arrived.

WHITE DESERT
ANTARCTICA

FROM TOP
White Desert's trips to Antarctica consist of a maximum of 12 people; Emperor penguins; The South Pole; White Desert's Whichaway camp

Sustainability is also a popular buzzword these days – what does it mean to you, and how do you uphold your sense of environmental responsibility?
When I first began White Desert and what would become a life-long journey into Antarctica, I was adamant that the core tenets of sustainability would remain at the heart of our operation. Almost 20 years later, I'm proud to say this philosophy

IMAGES **WHITE DESERT**

still stands true. We are constantly looking to the future of sustainability and pioneering new technologies in our operations. Our team ensures that exploration into these exceptional wildernesses can be done mindfully, always in harmony with the environment and without losing our signature sense of pioneering luxury.

We remove all waste from the Continent; we are creating solar arrays this year to allow us to move to a fully renewable power source for our camps over the next couple of seasons. The footprint of the camps is light, causing no more than a minor impact on the environment. We are the first operator in Antarctica to trial Sustainable Aviation Fuel in our operations.

I think it's worth considering that the impact that is happening to Antarctica is not due to science and tourism on the Continent, but mainly due to the choices all humans make in our daily lives at home. We hope that our past guests will go on to make a difference through their networks, helping to secure the future and protection of Antarctica, especially given there is no natural human population who calls the Continent their own. As Sir David Attenborough says, "No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

Your trips come at a relatively high cost. What type of person makes up your typical clientele?
Our clients come from various walks of life and countries, from well-known entrepreneurs to musicians, celebrities, royal family members, and even astronauts! We also have clients who have dreamt of visiting Antarctica their whole lives and saved for years to do this journey with us. Over 100,000 people are taken by ship to Antarctica from South America. We do things very differently, where we take only around 300 people and fly them from Cape Town, South Africa. Our guests get to sleep and spend time on the continent, rather than looking at it from the boats. Our flagship activity is getting people to the South Pole (fewer people visit the South Pole each year than summit Mt Everest) and to see the mighty emperor penguins at the Atka Bay colony.

ABOVE White Desert's Echo camp, "inspired by astronauts and used by explorers"

'We understand the psychological journey our guests go through because we've been through it ourselves'

How do you assure safety?
Safety is built into every aspect of our operation, starting with our team. Every guide has extensive polar experience, medical training, and has completed the rigorous training to become an IFMGA high mountain guide – a stringent certification that can take up to five years to complete.

We are constantly evaluating weather, ice conditions, and guest capabilities to mitigate any risk. We have multiple backup plans for every scenario, and we're not afraid to change or cancel activities if conditions aren't right. Our guests' safety always takes priority over their experience. Additionally, we maintain comprehensive emergency protocols, including evacuation procedures and satellite communication systems, which keep us connected to rescue services.

What's the most challenging part of the planning?
As is the case with many sought-after travel destinations around the globe, pristine areas of our planet are particularly vulnerable and do require safe-keeping. Antarctica is one of the most protected regions on Earth – the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) regulates all tourism activities in this area. We are a member of IAATO and have been so since our inception in 2005. Working closely with stakeholders, scientific stations and the Antarctic community, White Desert has contributed to shaping areas of policy implementation. Our goal is to pro-actively reduce impacts, self-regulate, and safeguard the environmental legacy of Antarctica for future generations. In addition, the cost, remoteness, and forbidding environment make this operation an incredible undertaking of pure grit; it never gets easier, we just get more experience – and most importantly never forget that Mother Nature rules this wilderness.

How far in advance do customers need to book one of your trips?
There is no set timeline, as long as they have enough time to complete the trip prerequisites, like obtaining an approved medical from a qualified doctor, and making it to Cape Town in time for their flight to Antarctica.

Do you offer similar trips elsewhere in the world, or do you have plans to do so in the future?
This year, White Desert is undergoing various exciting brand developments, including the launch of Dr. Jones. This new itinerary takes advantage of the repositioning of the Basler Planes from the Arctic to the Antarctic. The newly refurbished 1940s-style Basler Airplane will take guests on an epic 10-12 day journey exploring remote destinations in South America. The White Desert Foundation has also recently launched. This significant project will draw on three core pillars: supporting science, carbon reduction, and innovation. It aims to better understand the impact of climate change and how we can collectively do more to affect positive change. **BT**

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KICK-ASS CAREER

Hannah Brandler catches up with stunt woman Chelsea Mather, who has starred in films from *Bond* to *Barbie*

Q&A

How did you get into the stunt world?
I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a stunt woman. I saw the Indiana Jones stunt show at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, and immediately decided that was what I wanted to do when I grew up. I was sporty and already training for about 25 hours a week in gymnastics. Then, at the age of 16, I got an opportunity to work on the film *Kick-Ass 2*, where I doubled as Hit-Girl – a kid ninja who fights crime with her dad.

I'm only 5ft, so my niche is playing younger characters. It's whoever I fit size- and looks-wise. Since kids are always growing, they tend to outgrow me and then they need a new double. I've doubled for actors including Natalie Portman and Ariana Greenblatt.

What skills are required to be a stunt woman?
In the UK, we have the British Stunt Register, which is like a university for stunts. You have to complete six skills – I chose gymnastics, trampolining, high diving, rock climbing, scuba diving, and kickboxing. I'm always trying to get new qualifications. You've got to be self-motivating – there's no set 9 to 5 and it can be tough if you're training on your own a lot.

Are you currently training?
I've just been to the Galápagos Islands to progress on my scuba diving. There's loads of sealife and lots of strong currents. I've also been doing skydiving training and stunt driving courses – learning to spin cars.

Are you daring in regular life?
I've just been doing off-piste skiing and snowboarding. But I like to lead a fairly normal

life. I love hanging out with my old school friends that have known me for years.

The stunt and film world is such a unique place. No one really understands it unless you're involved. But it's about finding the balance and not being consumed by the industry the whole time.

Last year saw the release of *The Fall Guy*, an action film about stunt performers. What did you think of the movie?
I loved it. It was made by excellent stunt performers, so there's a lot of Easter eggs in the film for stunt people. It shines a light on our department, which is really great. They've also got great actors in it. I worked with Ryan Gosling on *Barbie* and he's incredible – so polite and kind.

Do you work closely with actors on set?
Yes, we rehearse stunts and they might do versions of them. You want actors to do as much as they can within their safety and competence level. But if you're doing a stunt 15 times, then it can take its toll. If an actor gets injured, then the whole film shuts down. We're more trained in falling over and getting hurt.

How do you protect yourself?
You rehearse for weeks even if it's just 30 seconds on screen.

DOLLED UP:
Chelsea doubled actor Kate McKinnon as Weird Barbie in 2023

Everything is choreographed – part of the art is making it look natural – and you put a lot of trust in stunt coordinators. For instance, if you're doing a wire stunt, they coordinate with the riggers and special effects team.

You also wear padding under costumes. For things like fireworks, you'll wear Nomex – the material that F1 drivers wear under their race suits.

I've had torn ligaments, like my ACL, but the only bone I've ever broken is my pinky finger.

How has the process evolved?
There's more safety involved, which is great for the industry. It's my body on the line at the end of the day. Some of the tricks, however, are the same – if it ain't broke, don't fix it. There's still the old-school trick of falling onto a stack of cardboard boxes with mats on top. The boxes are great because they crunch. Burt Reynolds used to do this.

'The hours are tricky – we work a lot of night shoots and it's hard doing stunts at 2am in the cold'

What are some of your most memorable stunts?
I was in the opening sequence of *James Bond: No Time To Die* as the stunt double for the younger version of Léa Seydoux's character, who gets trapped under an ice lake. We filmed it in Norway under 30cm of ice and had super thin wetsuits on, because the girl I doubled was in pyjamas so we couldn't look too bulky. It was incredible to be part of an iconic franchise.

We trained in cold water at Pinewood Studios for a month to get my body used to it. Then we spent two weeks filming the sequence, but it was only a couple of minutes on screen. We were going in and out of the water eight to 10 times a day.

Wonder Woman was amazing because we lived in the Amalfi Coast and learnt to sword fight. *Jurassic World Dominion* was great because I was running away from dinosaurs, and on *Barbie* I did gymnastics in six-inch heels and a huge puffy dress in a pink dream house.

I also just appeared in *Blitz*, directed by the brilliant Sir Steve McQueen. One of the scenes recreated the flooding of a Tube shelter. We worked with an amazing special effects team and had lots of stunt performers swept away by the water, which was incredible but also eerie.

IN ACTION:
Chelsea is often recognised for her cameo in *Killing Eve* with Jodie Comer

Do you have a dream role?
The forthcoming *Harry Potter* TV series. I read all the books when I was growing up.

Stunt performers often fly under the radar. Would you like to see more recognition, like an Oscars category, for the work?
The great thing is that a lot of people will have seen your work, but won't recognise you. While we don't do it for the awards, it would be nice because pretty much every other department gets recognised. Hopefully we'll have a category sometime soon.

What's most challenging about the job?
Finding the work/life balance. We don't have agents, we're self-employed and manage our own diaries, invoicing and tax returns. If you turn down work, you don't get paid. We also don't get a lot of notice – you have to drop everything and go. I've been called up and asked how quickly I can get to Heathrow. The hours are also tricky – we work a lot of night shoots and it's hard doing stunts at 2am in the freezing cold.

People rely on you and everything is timetabled – hair and make-up at 5:07am, then costume at 5:35am. If you turn up late, or not at all, it has a knock-on effect on the whole crew. I've never taken a sick day.

There are sacrifices – I can't book holidays in advance and sometimes it's heartbreaking because you miss weddings – but it's a dream job.

What's your top tip for working under pressure?
Get rid of the outside noise and just focus on what you're doing. Whatever you're interested in, have a goal. Whether it's eating healthier, training, reading more, or learning a language – just keep putting yourself in situations that aren't comfortable. That's how you grow. Recently, I felt I didn't have a focus, so I did the Ice Ultra marathon in Sweden – running for five days across 230km of the Arctic tundra in -40 degrees, carrying all my own kit.

What's coming up next?
I've just finished filming the *Peaky Blinders* movie. Follow @lifelikechelsea to find out more.

Finally, what's your inflight entertainment pick and indispensable travel gadget?
I set out how many films I can watch, and my Amex card is always useful to build points. **BT**

IMAGE **COURTESY OF THE BBC**

WORDS
ANDREW HARRISON-CHINN
Chief Marketing Officer, Dragonpass

OPINION

THE RISE OF TRAVEL AS A SERVICE IN THE GCC

TaaS is an integrated, technology-driven model that is redefining how we move - and is becoming a new baseline for modern travellers

The GCC's travel industry has undergone profound digital transformation over the last few years. With ambitious national visions, record infrastructure investment, and a digitally fluent population, the region is becoming a global proving ground for Travel as a Service (TaaS), an integrated, technology-driven model that is redefining how we move.

At its core, TaaS is about frictionless, personalised travel. It unifies disparate parts of the journey – airport services, transfers, hospitality, and more – into a single, intelligent experience. And it's what today's traveller increasingly expects. In the GCC, where premium travel is the norm rather than the exception, we see strong demand for services like airport lounge access, Fast Track, retail, and curated on-the-go dining. These aren't luxuries; they're becoming the baseline.

Through my line of work and my career, I've observed sustained growth in the uptake of airport experiences across the region, with consumer engagement increasing over 82% year-on-year where business and leisure often blend. In my experience, travellers from these markets value convenience, but also increasingly look for services that reflect deeper lifestyle values such as well-being, sustainability, and authenticity.

This shift is shaping the future of TaaS in profound ways. Wellness and environmentally-conscious travel, for example, are no longer niche. We're seeing growing interest in offerings that align with slow travel principles, eco-conscious destinations, stress-free airport environments, and services that support both personal well-being and environmental responsibility. As brands, we must meet travellers where they are – choosing experiences that reflect their values, not just their itineraries.

At the same time, AI is rapidly becoming the backbone of next-generation travel services. From smart recommendations during trip planning to real-time rebooking or lounge suggestions during disruptions, AI enables hyper-personalisation at scale. This is especially powerful in TaaS ecosystems, where a traveller's preferences can inform everything from their dining options to how they move through an airport. As a result, we are actively investing in AI technologies to enhance the user experience while maintaining accessibility and ease of use.

A DIGITALLY-FLUENT WORLD
Andrew Harrison-Chinn - who spent almost 10 years as Dragonpass's global managing director and CEO, before stepping into the CMO role to lead brand and comms on behalf of parent company Jupita - believes TaaS is key for the future.

> ‘At its core, Travel as a Service (TaaS) is about frictionless, personalised travel’

IMAGES SUPPLIED

Equally important is the growing demand for authentic, localised experiences. This is particularly relevant in markets like Saudi Arabia, where tourism is undergoing significant transformation. Travellers want more than cookie-cutter luxury; they're seeking immersive, culturally rich journeys that capture the uniqueness of a destination. TaaS platforms that offer curated local content, alternative destinations, and distinct airport touchpoints will have a clear competitive edge.

A key example is the "The Lounge" at NEOM Bay Airport in Saudi Arabia, offering both mixed-use and VIP services in a flagship smart city setting. This reflects a broader GCC trend, with major infrastructure upgrades underway across Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha, all designed to deliver seamless, premium travel. These developments align with national visions such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and Dubai's 2040 Urban Master Plan, reinforcing the region's role as a global leader in future-ready travel experiences.

I see the GCC not just as a growth market but as a benchmark for what modern travel can look like. TaaS provides the framework. Technology, sustainability, and cultural depth are the future – and together, they are shaping a travel experience that is not only smarter, but truly meaningful. **BT**

ART INNOVATOR

Hannah Brandler chats to Takashi Kudo, a member of teamLab – the international art collective from Japan

Q&A

IMAGE TEAMLAB, FLOATING FLOWER GARDEN: FLOWERS AND I ARE OF THE SAME ROOT, THE GARDEN AND I ARE ONE © TEAMLAB

Tell us about teamLab.
teamLab is an international art collective founded in 2001. It's made up of specialists with different skillsets, including painters, CG animators, software and hardware engineers, mathematicians, and architects. Founder Toshiyuki Inoko's background is in physics and robotics, while mine is in literature and philosophy. I joined in 2010 and previously worked as editor-in-chief for a video game magazine in Stockholm. I don't have a title as such at teamLab. We're a collective so we don't care about titles or independent names – we're a team!

What's teamLab's mission?
At teamLab, we try to form relationships between humans and the world through artworks.

It's comparable to travel. When people travel, they experience the world. For instance, you might be able to see Mount Fuji in guidebooks, magazines, the internet, or on TV, but if you really want to understand such a place then you need to travel there.

At teamLab, we try to bring people inside different worlds and provide an experience that can't be explained through words.

How has teamLab evolved?
When we started, we were a group of like-minded outsiders with dreams to create artworks using various new technologies as tools. Now, countries around the world treat us as artists.

Where has teamLab exhibited and how do you choose destinations?
Our philosophy is to say yes to all destinations and opportunities. We want to work with like-minded people who understand our art. Projects, however, can take five to six years, so we can't work to tight, demanding schedules. We first debuted outside of Japan in 2011, with an exhibition at Kaikai Kiki Gallery in Taipei. Since then, we've gone all over the world – from New York to London, Paris, Singapore, Beijing, and Melbourne.

The exhibitions are incredibly interactive. Can you give us some examples of how guests interact with the artworks?
We've tried to recreate experiences of nature inside our museums. teamLab's works are immersive, so they include wind, aromas, and sounds. We're not gods so we can't create natural wonders like a forest or rainbow, but we can use architecture and technology to create a similar experience. It's akin to how Impressionist artists used paint to depict nature.

In the *Floating Flower Garden* at teamLab Planets TOKYO, the space is filled with orchids that float above people as they wander through.

New exhibits
coming to Hamburg, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Utrecht and Kyoto in 2025

2,504,264 people
visited teamLab Planets TOKYO between April 2023 and March 2024, setting a Guinness World Record for the world's most visited museum for a single art group

What project are you most proud of?
The creation of our permanent museums, teamLab Borderless: MORI Building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM and teamLab Planets TOKYO, were a turning point. It was also amazing to see sold-out tickets for our exhibitions in San Francisco's Palo Alto in 2019, and in London in 2017.

What's next for teamLab?
A new exhibition called teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi in the emirate's Saadiyat Cultural District. We've been working on the 17,000 sqm building for almost six years. We would like to create large-scale exhibitions and want to share the experience with as many people as possible. We'd love to do something in the UK and the US.

Where have you travelled recently?
Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, New York, and Austin.

What's your dream destination?
South America and South Africa. I also really like the UK, especially the beautiful countryside. **BT**

ABOVE FROM LEFT: Cenk Alakurt; Lobby; Atrium View room

BOTTOM: A meeting room at the new Moxy Istanbul Taksim

The Elevator Pitch

Business Traveller Middle East gives **Cenk Alakurt**, General Manager of Moxy Istanbul Taksim, five minutes to pitch his property to prospective guests

Welcome to Moxy Istanbul Taksim, where we invite both locals and travellers to experience Istanbul through a new lens. Perfectly positioned in the heart of Beyoğlu, just steps from Taksim Square and the vibrant rhythm of İstiklal Avenue, our hotel is a dynamic hub for curious explorers and modern professionals alike.

Housed in the historic Afrika Han building, our hotel blends contemporary design with deep local character. Designed by Designist Architecture, the interiors are bold and purposefully layered to reflect Istanbul's unique energy. Original artwork inspired by classic Turkish cinema gives the hotel a strong local identity - delivering an experience that's both rooted in local culture and unmistakeably global.

We offer 167 cleverly-designed guest rooms, including our standout Sweetie Suite, all built with the young-at-heart traveller in mind. Pairing Moxy flair with smart functionality, these rooms feature essentials such as plush bedding, walk-in showers, USB ports, smart TVs, and fast, free wifi. Every element helps to deliver comfort and ensure that guests are always ready to explore.

At the centre of our hotel is our buzzing lobby – a vibrant social hub designed to be anchored by Bar Moxy. Here, you'll find expertly crafted cocktails and local brews served around the clock. Our full-service restaurant offers a curated menu of international dishes from breakfast through dinner, all served in a music-infused setting. For those on the move, our 24/7 Grab & Go Delights station keeps snacks and drinks at your fingertips, while our Breakfast Bar offers a fresh, casual twist on Turkish morning classics to kickstart your day.

> ‘Original artwork inspired by classic Turkish cinema gives the hotel a strong local identity’

Whether you visit to unwind or work, Moxy Istanbul Taksim has you covered. We're proud to offer 100 sqm of flexible meeting and event space, including a fully-equipped 10-seat boardroom and a plug-and-play co-working zone, all ideal for seamless productivity. Outfitted with state-of-the-art AV equipment and seamless connectivity, these spaces ensure that all manner of corporate events and creative workshops are delivered effortlessly for our clients.

Guests looking to stay active can take advantage of our 24-hour gym, while those seeking connection can kick back and relax in our vibrant social spaces, designed to bring people together through spontaneous conversation, music moments, and shared experiences.

Beyond our walls, our unbeatable location makes us an ideal launchpad for exploring Istanbul's rich history. From world-famous cultural landmarks like Galata Tower and Topkapi Palace, to the hidden gems of Beyoğlu's backstreets, the best of the city is at your doorstep.

At Moxy Istanbul Takism, we combine substance with style, and functionality with personality. We're proud to offer a characterful, fresh alternative to the traditional hotel experience. Whether you're a local looking for a new hangout or a traveller looking for something unexpected, we can't wait to welcome you. **BT**

IMAGES **MOXY ISTANBUL TAKSIM**

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Bay of Kotor

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

The hidden treasure of the Adriatic Sea

THIS BEAUTIFUL, HAMLET-LIKE part of Montenegro is also known by the name Boka Bay, or historically, Cattaro - and sometimes referred to as the southernmost fjord in Europe. The area encompasses a number of charming towns, including Tivat (into which flydubai offers a direct flight from the UAE), Herceg Novi, Perast, Risan, and its namesake Kotor. Its history dates back to medieval times, and this coastal gem is well worth a visit in the Balkans.

IMAGES **YI-HWA HANNA**

MORNING
Start your day bright and early at the main entrance of Kotor's Old Town: the Sea Gate. A historical landmark in itself, it was constructed in 1955, and bears remnants of the area's time under Venetian rule, such as the winged Lion of St Mark - the symbol of Venice. Past the entrance, you'll find the Clock Tower, situated in Weapons Square, where it's been since the 17th century. Kotor and its old town are a short drive (roughly 20 minutes) from Tivat, which is the youngest town in the area - although it also has a long history, having been founded in the 14th century. It's wise to get to Kotor's Old Town early, when its gates open to the public at 7 or 8am, before the large crowds of cruise ship day-visitors descend upon its charming little streets.

If you're after a truly spectacular view, you can start with a climb up Kotor Fortress, before the heat of the daytime sun makes the moderately challenging 254m to its top - which involves around 1,350 stone steps - more breathless. Once back in the city, you can cool down with a gelato. Two exceptional choices are Moritz Eis and Catarissimo The former hails from Serbia, with the brand now present across Montenegro as well as in Romania, Kosovo, Chile, and Austria, selling unique flavours. The latter is locally-founded, selling top classics.

There is plenty to see in the Old Town, or Stari Grad, from its beautiful narrow streets (including one so tiny it's known as the "Let Me Pass" passage) to its various churches. It's also a great place to pick up a souvenir or a few. There's a maritime museum that will entertain the nautical enthusiast, and if you're a cat-lover, there's also a cat museum, which donates its fees to the care of strays in the area. You'll find the felines all over town too; a fact that is celebrated with the many cat-themed items in the local shops.

AFTERNOON
If you're looking for a hearty lunch, there are a lot of great places to eat in Old Town - La Catedral Pasta Bar is a top pick for lovers of Italian food, with quite a few unique Montenegrin dishes on the menu too. If it's lighter fare you're after, consider hopping in a taxi to the Kraken Underwater Cellar. At this floating casual resto-bar, you'll find fresh food - so fresh the mussels are literally pulled from the sea around it, and fish and prawns caught nearby too - that you can enjoy with their unique sea-aged wine. The restaurant's patented technique involves ageing and storing it 20m below sea level, and your order will be hoisted from the depths, to be poured into glasses that tuck into your table, so they don't slide off.

With your belly full and your energy restored, take another taxi to Perast - a tiny coastal town that you can walk across in 20 minutes. It may be small, but its appeal is mighty: amidst its scenery you'll find at least 16 churches and 19 palaces. The town used to be home to a number of prominent maritime families, and you can learn more about its rich past in the Perast Town Museum. Perast is also a key jumping-off point to catch a boat out to some truly interesting nearby sites only accessibly by boat. To maximise your time, hire a private skipper, such as Black Pearl Perast. Your trip will include a visit to the Submarine Tunnels - secret old bases that belonged to Yugoslavia's navy - as well as the Blue Caves - a stunning natural attraction with the bluest waters; and Our Lady of the Rocks, an islet that is the only artificial island in Montenegro, created by local seamen with rocks and old sunken ships, and now home to a truly fascinating church. You'll also get a chance to view of Mamula Island, a 19th-century fort--turned-former-prison that's now a private luxury hotel.

EVENING
Return to Perast in time for sunset (around 8pm in the summer), and an exceptional seafood dinner at Restaurant Conte. If you like live music, head to the piazza of Riva restaurant - part of the Heritage Grand Perast. The five-star hotel, located within the historic Smekja Palace, is a truly dreamy place to rest. **BT**

'A historical landmark, it bears remnants of the area's time under Venetian rule'

INTRO PAGE: Perast

TOP FROM LEFT: Blue Caves; view from Saint Nicholas Church's bell tower, Perast

BOTTOM FROM LEFT: Old Town walls, Kotor; Heritage Grand Perast

flydubai operates four flights a week to Tivat

IMAGES YI-HWA HANNA

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Our guide to... fun regional summer hotel deals

Staying in the GCC this summer? Here are some great hotel deals to take advantage of!

1

SHANGRI-LA HOTELS & RESORTS has launched a new "Eat Play Love" campaign for the summer, that aims to reimagine the art of travel through the spirit of self-discovery. Hoping to take guests beyond the idea of a traditional staycay, it offers guests the chance to choose one of several curated experiences that are included as part of their package. At the Shangri-La Dubai, for instance, this could be a Dim Sum masterclass at Shang Palace, a day excursion to the Green Planet, a treatment at CHI, The Spa, or a yoga class. Rates start from Dhs830 per night, with breakfast and one Eat, Play, or Love experience included per night of stay.

2

CONRAD ABU DHABI ETIHAD TOWERS has launched a Stay, Dine & Play package that offers a half-board basis, wherein guests will also receive one complimentary theme park ticket per person to any of Yas Island's award-winning theme parks (including Ferrari World Yas Island, Abu Dhabi; Yas Waterworld Yas Island, Abu Dhabi; Warner Bros World Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, and SeaWorld Yas Island, Abu Dhabi). Prices vary depending on number of nights, with a minimum stay of two nights to avail of the package – with the theme park visit to take place on the first or second day of the stay. The hotel also has a UAE residents offer with 25% off all F&B.

IMAGE **NATALIA/ADOBE STOCK**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

3

THE RADISSON BLU HOTEL DUBAI MEDIA CITY is giving guests the chance to enjoy a "24 hour staycation" anytime until 30 September, offering a flexible check-in and check-out that allows them to stay for a full 24 hours after whatever time they've arrived – from just Dhs260 a night. The deal also includes 20% off all F&B outlets within the hotel (with the exception of Room Service and Jones the Grocer).

4

With Oman's Jabal Akhdar a notable average 15 degrees cooler than the country's coastal areas, **HOTEL INDIGO JABAL AKHDAR RESORT & SPA** is offering a range of outdoor activities with their summer packages. This can be a three-village hike, a custom stargazing session, the chance to experience the region's pomegranate harvest (only available from mid-August to October), or the Rummana Agritourism festival (from 18 July to 28 September), which celebrates mountain culture through a gathering of local farmers and artisans, with live cooking, cultural performances, traditional crafts, and more. Rates start at OMR85 per night, including breakfast, with OMR20 credit towards dining and wellness experiences.

5

Until 30 September, guests of any **ROVE HOTELS** can supersize their stay by booking into the hotel's 36 Hour Promo – available exclusively for stays booked online, for any of the brand's properties in the UAE. The deal includes an early check-in at 9am with a late check-out at 9pm.

6

Need a wellness break? The **H HOTEL DUBAI** is offering an overnight stay in its grand suite with a 120-minute spa treatment at the Santai Spa by Mandara, along with a complimentary spa amenity gift, Dhs100 food and beverage credit, a 30-minute Peloton Bike Class, complimentary use of the Peloton Bike Studio anytime you want (as well as the regular gym, and the outdoor pool), and a complimentary breakfast and late checkout.

7

VOCO DUBAI THE PALM has launched a Kids Stay and Eat Free Staycation deal running until 31 August, which allows kids under 12 to stay for free as well as dine all day from a dedicated kids' menu at Maison Mathis – plus enjoy unlimited ice cream by the pool and beach, and sip on free-flow soft drinks at Maison Mathis and Frenia Pool & Beach. There's no minimum stay required, and each room accommodates up to two children — one on a rollaway bed and one sharing existing bedding with the parents. In the meantime, grown-ups can enjoy both a rooftop pool and private beach.

8

Enhance your stay with art and movement through **RIXOS PREMIUM SAADIYAT ISLAND'S** artful escape package, wherein guests booking a minimum two-night stay will also receive complimentary tickets for two adults to teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi. The 17,000 sqm immersive museum in the Saadiyat Cultural District offers a one-of-a-kind immersive experience, which you can discuss with loved ones over an all-inclusive stay at the nearby property anytime until 30 September (as long as it's booked at least 48 hours in advance). **BT**

WORDS
LAUREL IVES

The rise of the wellness social club

This New York members' club prioritises health over hedonism, combining spaces for social connection with the latest treatments

AS THE NUMBER of people drinking alcohol continues to decline, a health-conscious generation is looking for a new setting for socialising.

Enter Remedy Place, the 'social wellness club' where members mingle over bone broth, IV drips, and cold plunges.

With sites already operating in LA and New York, Remedy has just opened its largest club to date in New York's SoHo. Boston is next, and the company is planning new clubs annually.

"It's a luxury club destination where guests can socialise and connect while prioritising their well-being," explains Jonathan Leary, founder and CEO of Remedy Place.

Group experiences include a 'contrast suite', which has a traditional sauna and ice bath complete with a mini bar serving healthy drinks and snacks, and a sunken, communal living room for blissed-out chats.

In SoHo, new treatments include AI-powered bodywork, a deep tissue massage, a customisable infrared sauna suite, and an IV library where guests can work or read while getting their fill of vitamins. Non-members can also book traditional treatments, such as acupuncture and massages.

SELF-CARE
Meet and mingle beside a cosy fire or in a detoxifying sauna at the new social wellness hub

IMAGES **PAUL JORDAN, BLACKPOINT DESIGN LIMITED**

THAT'S WYLD
Liverpool gets a taste of a Finnish floating sauna

The UK's first floating sauna makes a splash

Liverpool welcomes Nordic traditions with a modern sauna experience at Princes Dock

BRITAIN'S BOOMING sauna scene is showing no signs of slowing down, and it now has its first floating variation. The elegant Finnish-style Wyld Sauna opened at the end of November in Liverpool's Princes Dock, capable of holding up to 30 people, with four ice baths alongside. Sauna-goers can also plunge into the chilly waters of the dock, which have an 'excellent' water quality rating and are tested fortnightly. "Our mission is to bring the best of the Nordic sauna tradition to Liverpool and the UK, where anyone can come, unwind and reconnect – and this location gives us the perfect blend of city energy and natural calm," said Jon Miller, co-founder of Wyld Sauna.

For those keen on visiting the ancestral home of the sauna, head to Helsinki to enjoy the recently opened Uusi Sauna – complete with saunas, steam rooms, and a large bar and bistro next door to cool off.

◆

Did you know?

The number of saunas is doubling on an annual basis in Britain

Hotel healing

THE ZEM WELLNESS CLINIC ALTEA, opening in January in the Spanish city of Alicante, aims to boost well-being through its programmes based on high-end medical principles. Its setting is relaxing and luxurious, offering sea views, fruit, and vegetables sourced from a local organic farm, an extensive spa, pools, and ample surrounding nature. When it comes to treatments, consider the 'Pro-Ageing' programme, which includes medical tests, consultations, treatments and holistic therapies to "embrace the passage of time". You can also add on 'boosts' – mini treatments targeting a range of health concerns, from sexual well-being to sleep and hair loss. The region itself is becoming a destination for hotel healing, with the clinic's CEO Franck De Weerdt hailing from the renowned SHA Wellness just 25 minutes away.

IMAGES SUPPLIED; COURTESY OF ZEM WELLNESS ALTEA

WORDS
LAUREL IVES

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Smart Mirrors led the charge at this year's CES, joining an array of AI tech innovations

SMART MIRRORS go beyond providing a simple reflection. Using AI, sensors, and digital displays, they are able to offer personal health and beauty insights.

The futuristic Withings Omnia mirror and scales caused a stir at the trade show. Users step on the scale and 360-degree body scanners measure their weight and both metabolic and heart health, while an AI voice assistant offers friendly feedback.

Omnia can also pull medical data collected from other trackers like your smartwatch or blood pressure monitor to provide recommendations.

> Given the interest at the trade fair, expect to see smart mirrors on the market soon

The Omnia mirror is only at the concept stage (and too large for a conventional bathroom) but Withings is working on a smaller consumer version.

Samsung also showcased its Micro LED Beauty Mirror. The camera at the top scans your face in roughly 30 seconds and analyses skin to assess four areas – pores, wrinkles, melanin (tone), and redness. This is combined with data from 20,000 clinical image-based skin diagnoses to deliver an AI Skin Report. Recommendations for skincare products are then displayed on the mirror screen. The Micro LED Beauty Mirror is also in the concept stage.

Sleep analysis
WITHINGS

CHECK YOURSELF OUT Soon you'll be able to retrieve information about your health and skincare with Withings Omnia mirror and scales

Plasma therapy in the Big Apple

AMAN HOTELS IS known for offering cutting-edge treatments, and its New York hotel has just launched Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) Therapy in partnership with the Manhattan-based aesthetic centre, bodySCULPT, known for specialising in minimally invasive medical aesthetics.

PRP works by using the healing properties of your blood to rejuvenate your skin – hence its nickname as the "vampire" facial when it was first popularised by celebrities like Kim Kardashian.

As well as for facials, PRP can also be used on the head, neck and hands. A small amount of the individual's blood is taken and then spun in a centrifuge to extract the platelet-rich plasma, a powerful substance rich in growth factors that promote cell repair, stimulate collagen, reduce acne scarring and fine lines, while also improving hyperpigmentation and promoting hair growth. The platelet-rich plasma is then injected or applied to areas of concern. And if you're not convinced, improvements can reportedly be seen after just one treatment.

DID YOU KNOW? Hilton hotels has partnered with Calm, a leading app for sleep, meditation classes and relaxing soundscapes. Launching this month, guests can access the app for free from their in-room TV.

TAKE THE COLD PLUNGE

THOSE OF US who love cold water swimming know that the biggest faff is the speedy changing required to warm up afterwards. Enter the WYLDING boiler suit, invented by cold water swimmers, Daniela Bohling and Millie Dornan (wife of actor Jamie Dornan).

The suit is light and flexible, so you can wear it over your swimmers en route to the shores, and its micro fleece lining means its cosy enough to pull on after a chilly dip.

Plus, it's surprisingly flattering to wear and a great addition to your cold swimming wardrobe.

The WYLDING suit costs £160 and comes in three colours: Moss Green, Midnight Black and Marine Blue. Each year, the brand offers a guest colour – last year it was on-trend Burgundy combined with an ice-blue fleece, while this summer sees the launch of Cocoa with a sky-blue lining.

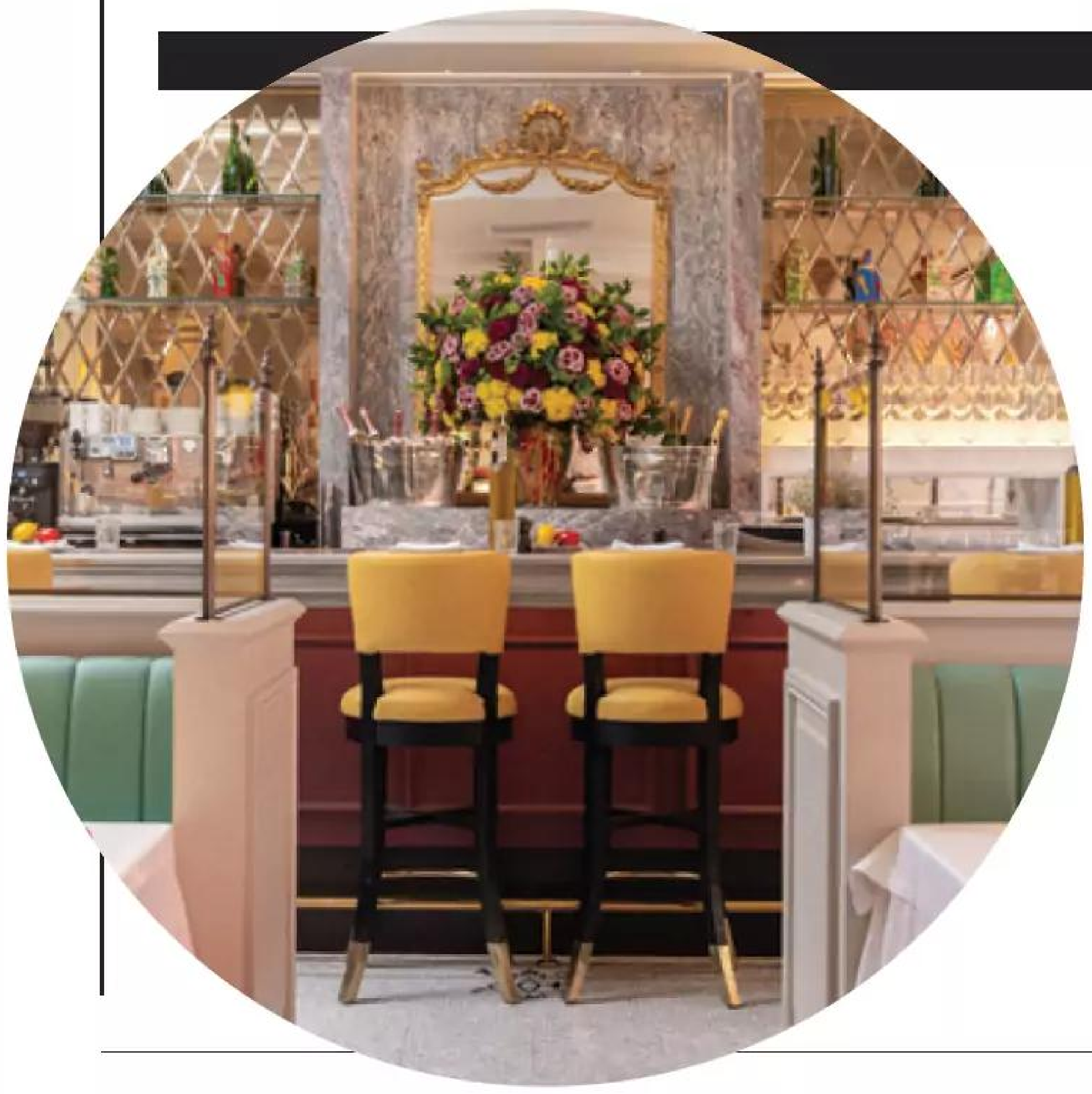
IMAGES WITHINGS; ROBERT RIEGER

A family affair

Treat the whole squad with a new range of curated culinary experiences

THROUGH THE SUMMER season, InterContinental Ras Al Khaimah Mina Al Arab Resort & Spa will turn into a land of indulgence, with a series of superb dining offers at seven of its dining venues, including NoHo Bar & Grill, Shasha, Levant & Nar, Sahar Beach Bar, the ShaSha Cabana Experience, Victory View, and Amarbar. From burgers and brews to steak frites, private cabana escapes, freshly-shucked Dibba Bay oysters, and a Sunday roast to brunch, afternoon tea, sundowners, and late-night eats, it has something for everyone – and for stays until 30 September, families can take advantage of a Kids Stay & Dine Free offer, 20% off dining, spa credit, and more.

THE EXPERIENCE



Fresh new look, same beloved French Riviera charm

La Petite Maison Riyadh recently unveiled a new, revamped look with interiors by Sagrada, a custom mural by artist Sanja Kovačević, and an upgraded bar and lounge area. The updated menu features seasonal additions, as well as a new Business Lunch available from Sundays to Thursdays from 12:30 to 3:30pm, priced at SAR180 for *Le Petit Menu* or SAR230 for *Le Grand Menu*, with three courses each.

IMAGES INTERCONTINENTAL; LA PETITE MAISON RIYADH

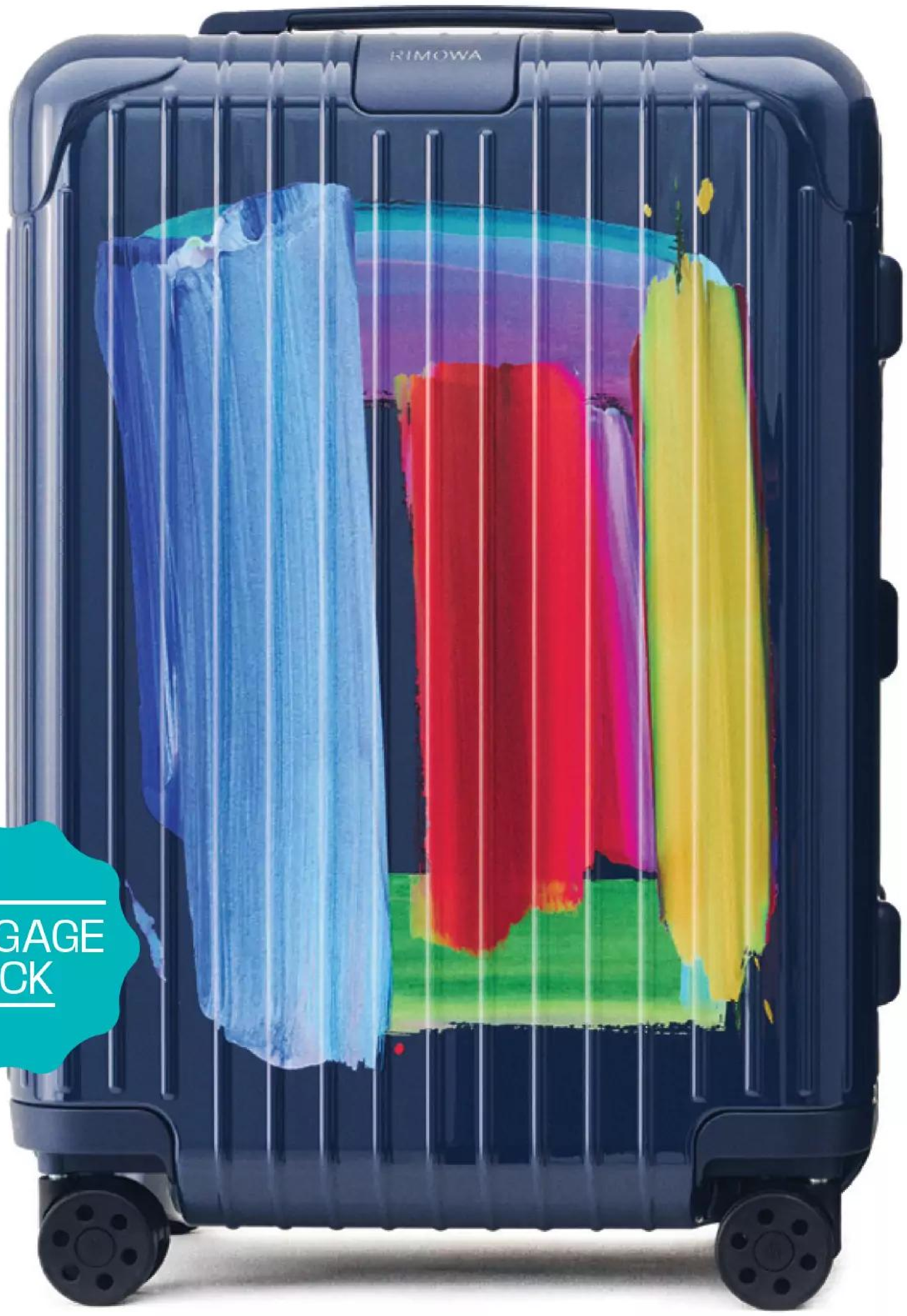
WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA,
HANNAH BRANDLER

THE BAG

Art of travel

RIMOWA adds an abstract look to its high-end cabin cases

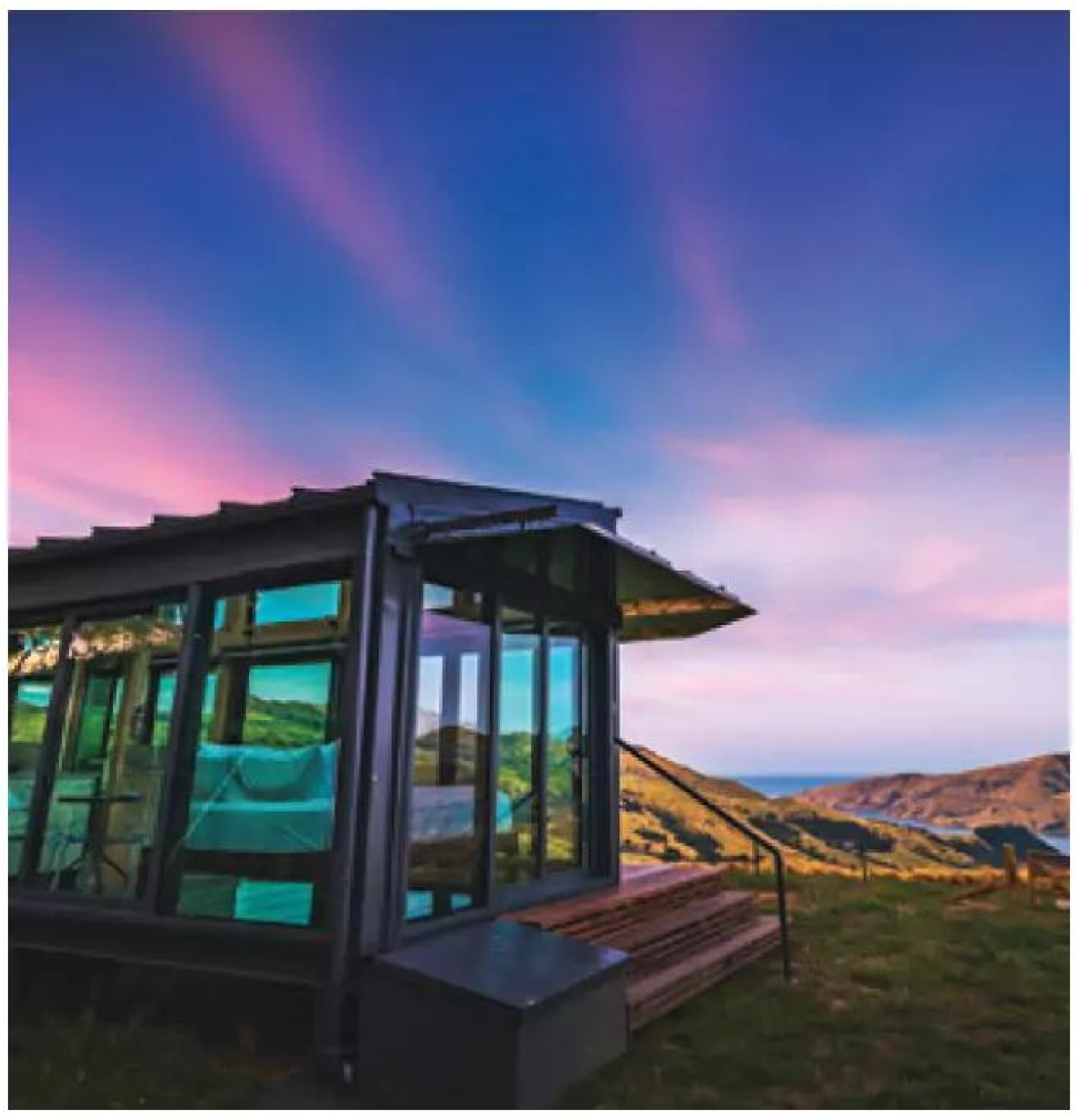
HIGH-END luggage brand RIMOWA has partnered with British artist Ptolemy Mann for a limited-edition series of cases, including this Essential Cabin Nautical, whose polycarbonate shell features an iteration of Mann's 'Threshold' artwork. Inside, you'll find further hints of abstract expressionism. Available at stores worldwide and online for Dhs5,452.



LUGGAGE PICK

THE EXPERIENCE

Panoramic picture



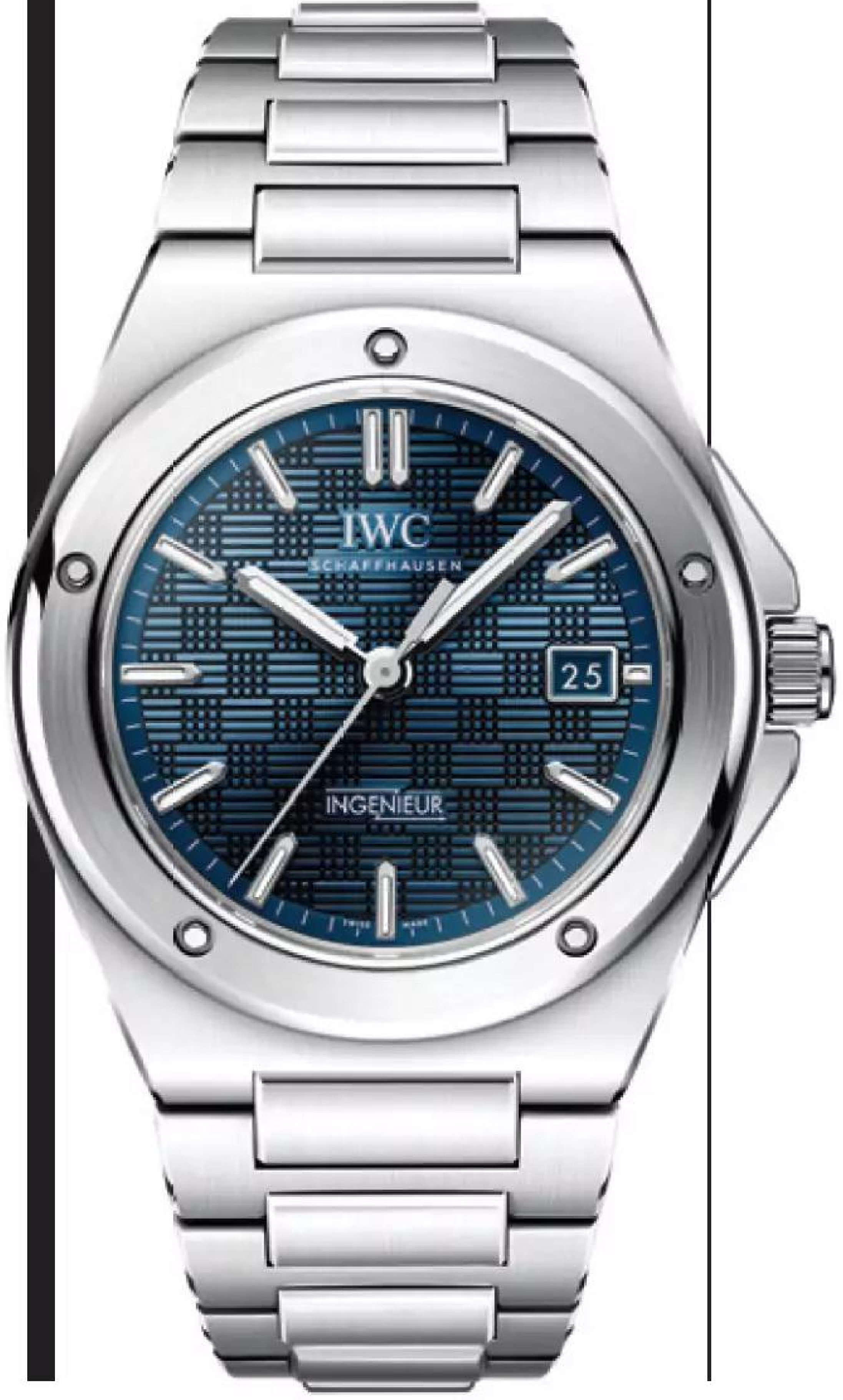
TRAVEL SPECIALISTS, New Zealand In Depth, have unveiled a new glass-walled pod on the country's North Island, marrying minimalist luxury with eco design. Stays at the secluded solar-powered Matū PurePod promise uninterrupted views of the Waitomo wilderness – from sunrise vistas to magical Milky Way nights – while the lack of wifi encourages guests to connect with nature rather than emails. Fret not, the cabins are still replete with luxury linen and a powerful hot shower. A one-night stay starts from NZ$508 per person per night, including dinner and a breakfast hamper (based on two people sharing). An additional 15 PurePods are dotted across the North and South islands – from Waipara Valley to the Rakiura Stewart Island conservation reserve.

THE WATCH

Dial into this new style

Swiss watch company IWC Schaffhausen has unveiled its latest stylish timepiece. The Ingenieur Automatic 40, complete with a bold blue dial, draws inspiration from Gérald Genta's Ingenieur SL from the 1970s.

Priced at £10,100 and available at watches-of-switzerland.co.uk



IMAGES **COURTESY OF RIMOWA; PAUL WILSON IMAGES; IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN**

Explore CULTURE

WORDS
HANNAH BRANDLER
ALICE HENDERSON
YI-HWA HANNA

WATCH

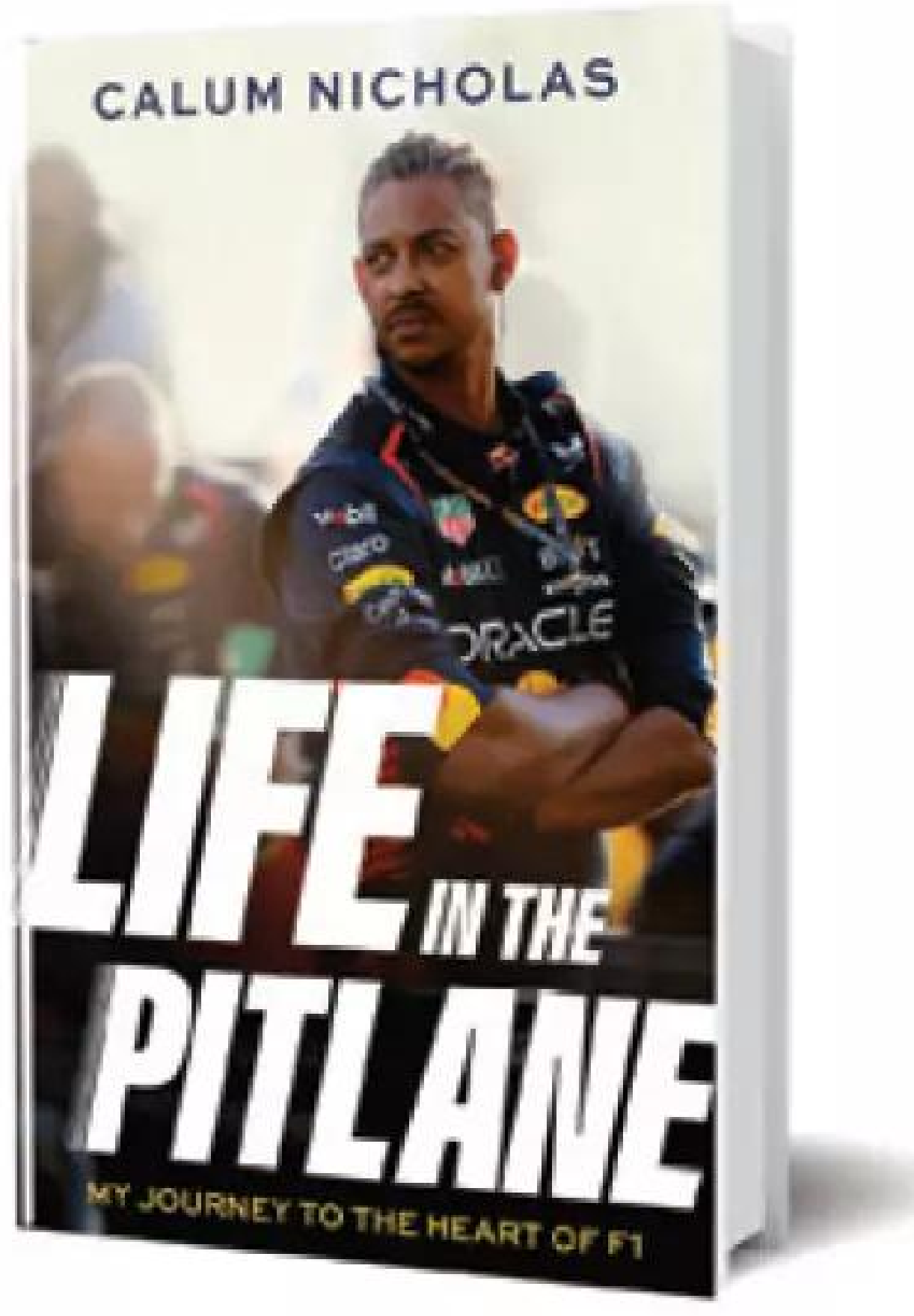
Zero Day

Robert De Niro has taken on the world of TV production – starring in and executive producing this Netflix series that began streaming on 20 February. The thriller follows fictional former president George Mullen who investigates a cyberattack. At a time of widespread disinformation, the show asks the topical question: "How do we find truth in a world in crisis?"

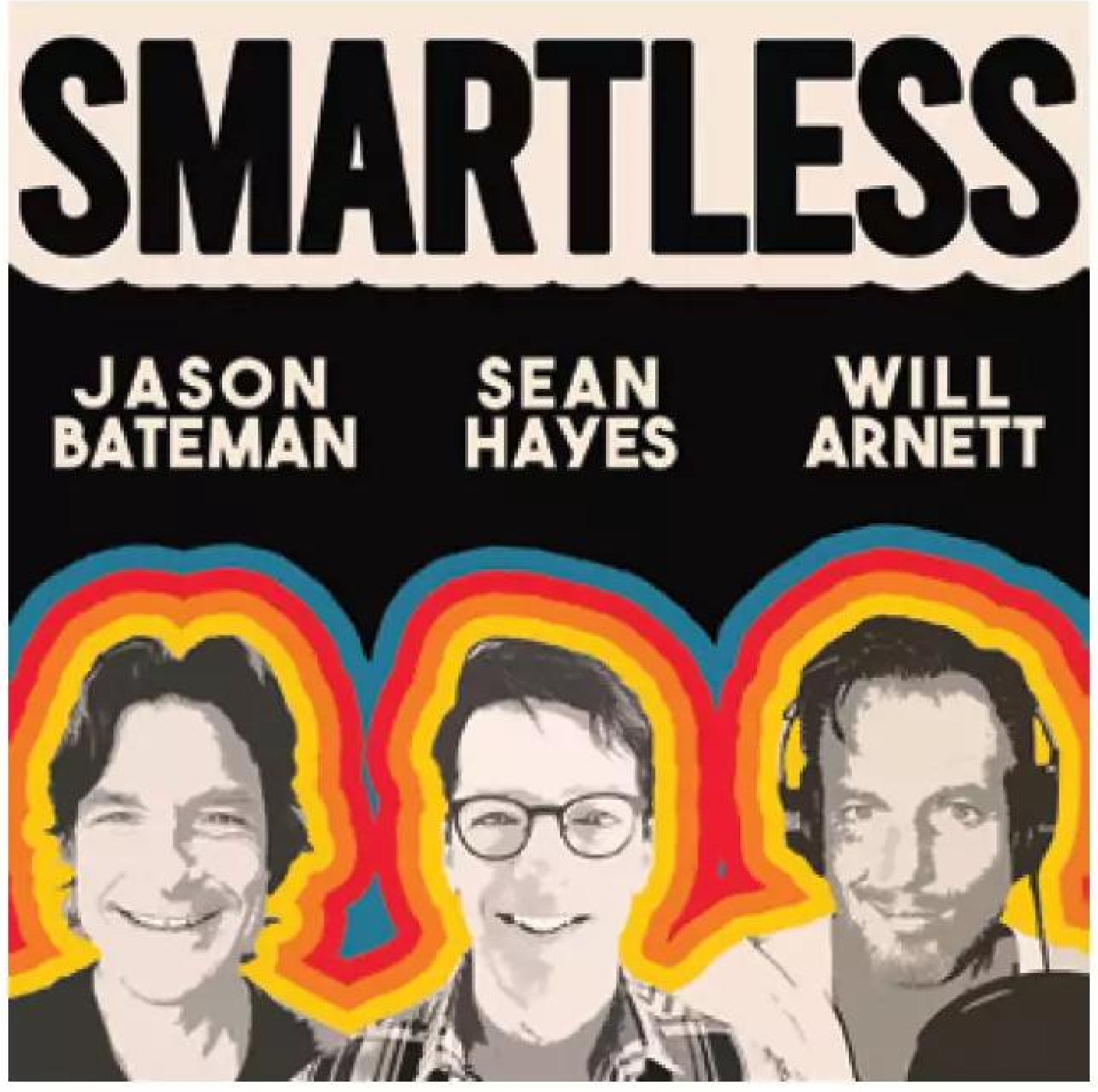
READ

Life in the Pitlane: My Journey to the Heart of F1 by Calum Nicholas

DELVE INTO THE WORLD OF FORMULA 1 with this memoir from Red Bull's senior engineer, and frequent traveller, Calum Nicholas. He shares his experience of (literally) living life on the road and the lessons he's learned along the way. Expect fast-paced, thrilling tales of his time working in the pit lane, as well as a look at the motorsport industry – how it's changed over the past 15 years and what lies ahead. Dhs125; available from Amazon.ae



LISTEN



Smartless

FILM FANS WILL ENJOY this weekly podcast hosted by actors Jason Bateman, Sean Hayes, and Will Arnett. The trio started the podcast during the pandemic and now boast over 200 episodes, interviewing big names every week. Recent guests include actors Hugh Grant, Daniel Craig, and Gillian Anderson, as well as director Denis Villeneuve.

CULTURAL CALENDAR

OUR PICK OF EVENTS TAKING PLACE AROUND THE WORLD

Bregenz Festival, Vorarlberg, Austria

16 July - 17 August

Known locally as the Bregenzer Festspiele, this renowned performing arts festival is held every July and August in Bregenz, in the westernmost state of Austria. It's been an international event since 1946 - a year after World War II - and takes place on a floating stage on Lake Constance. Opening with the Opera, guests can expect orchestras, fireworks, and more.

The World Games 2025, Chengdu, China

The 12th edition of this event - which includes a range of sports and sporting disciplines that aren't covered in the Olympic Games, such as Tug of War and Cheerleading - will take place in this mega-city in China. The destination is known for its Sichuan cuisine, and for being a major conservation and breeding base for one of the world's laziest animals, the giant panda.

Bristol International Balloon Fiesta, UK

8 – 10 August

Free to attend and lasting for three days, this now-iconic festival is returning for its 47th year in 2025. During this time, the English city's skies turn into a hub for hundreds of unique hot air balloons, raised by teams from across the UK and around the world, with food, music, and both daytime and nighttime entertainment.

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HOW WELLNESS TOURISM IS TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE TRAVEL

CHECKING IN, ZONING OUT

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

Although the baseline of many wellness treatments seems to follow the ethos of encouraging people to slow down, breathe more, and generally take a more balanced approach to life, the growth of the tourism industry that surrounds it has been doing the opposite: it's growing at a very rapid, ever-expanding pace. Predicted to be worth an already impressive US$637 billion in 2022, that projection has now surged to a whopping $1.35 trillion anticipated by 2028 – an almost 100% increase, in a very short span of time.

The tourism industry's fastest growing sector, it has evolved from being a niche to a must-have: where a hotel could once get away with only having a casual spa treatment here and there as its wellness offering, nowadays, properties are realising that guests need more. From ways to enhance their fitness to rituals that improve their sleep, balms for the soul as well as the mind and body, and techniques that lean into ancient and historic traditions to those that utilise the most cutting-edge technology, wellness is no longer an add-on – it's often a driving factor for why people book in a stay in the first place.

Feeling overstimulated by everyday life? Head to a quiet nature retreat. Need a goal to drive your new exercise regime? Book yourself into a mara-cation. Want to find yourself again, or explore more of your inner healing? Book yourself into a spiritual meditation retreat. If you're physically as well as mentally burnt out and in need of solid rest, you can opt for a holistic sleep retreat instead – and if you're concerned about the effects of ageing, a visit to a resort with a longevity clinic, or one that offers a getaway with biohacking treatments at the same time, could be just what the doctor ordered. Whatever your ailment, there's a wellness travel option for it, as these two sectors are becoming inextricably intertwined.

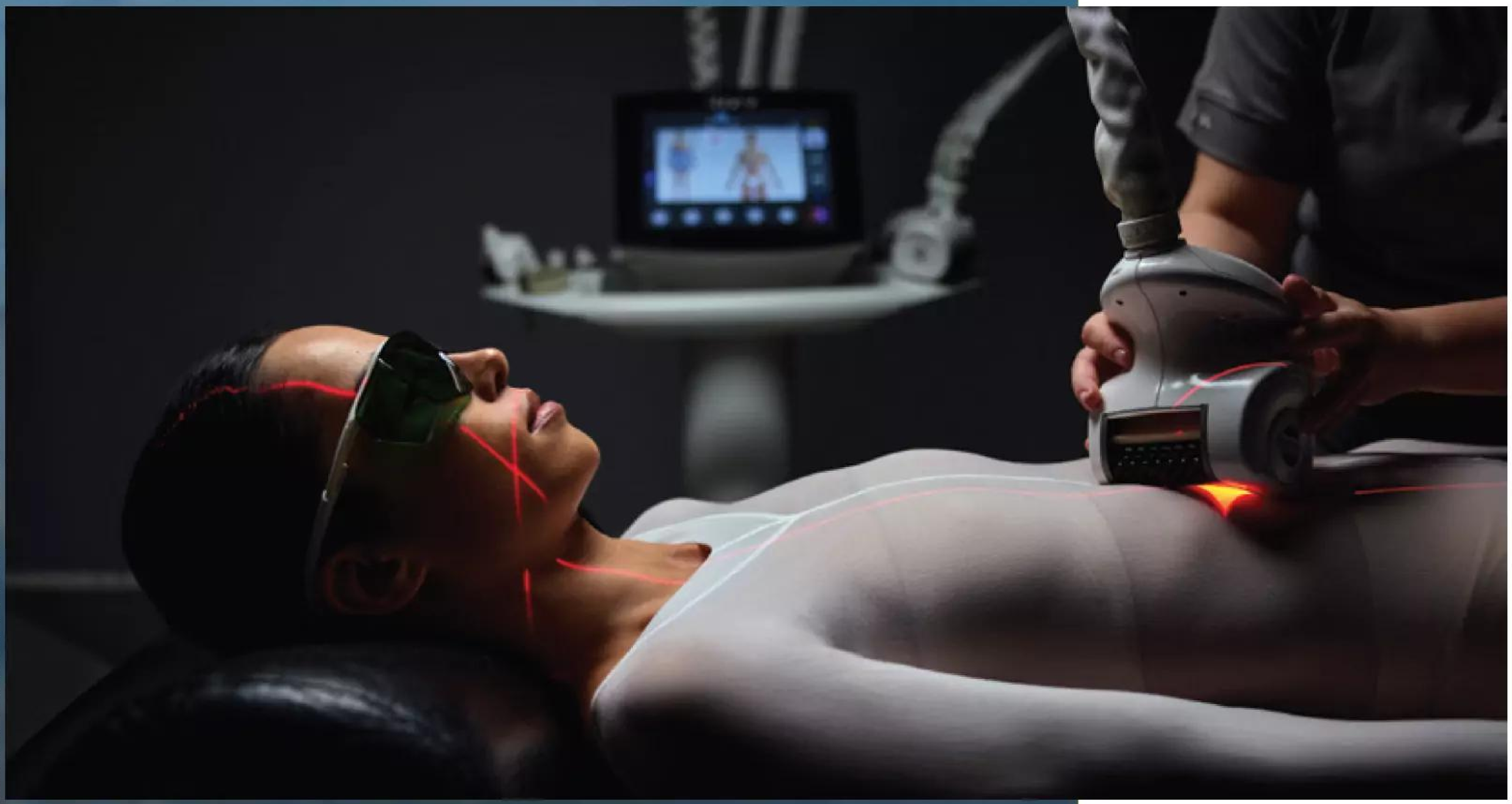
Women's health holidays

There are multiple reasons behind the push for women-focused wellness retreats. Statistics show that women's overall per capita travel spend exceeds that of men – by at least 8%, according to Trip.com – and women tend to participate more in wellness travel too. Some also feel safer and more comfortable on a trip tailored to women. And women's bodies have unique, often complex health needs, both mentally and physically. One brand catering to this is SHA – the world's most-awarded longevity resort – which has leaned in with their new Women's Comprehensive Health Unit. It boasts a clinically-approached and holistically-supported way to address key physiological stages from reproduction and menopause to ageing, with a team of gynecologists, physiotherapists, osteopaths, psychologists, regenerative-medicine experts, intimate-dermoesthetics specialists, revitalisation physicians, and TCM practitioners. Kamalaya Koh Samui Wellness Sanctuary's Radiant Bliss programme also caters to women navigating stages like motherhood, perimenopause, and more, through 8-, 15-, or 21-night retreats.

Mara-cations

Travel can often come with a higher step count than we tend to hit in our day-to-day lives, but a growing number of people are getting that cardio in through more than just walking around a new city or doing a nature hike on holiday: they're planning their vacations around running. In fact, many are travelling specifically to take part in well-known marathons around the world. It can take months of planning, both with training as well as having to secure a spot in the run in the first place – the London Marathon, *(pictured above)* has so many global applicants it even has a ballot process. The appeal? It combines a passion for running with travel to new places, provides a sense of accomplishment, makes for a worthy personal goal that expands the excitement of the trip beyond the travel period itself, and it gives the person some serious bragging rights. For hotels hosting these guests, an early breakfast, proximity to race routes, and a range of recovery-friendly wellness facilities can go a long way.

→



IMAGES **MARCO BOTTIGELLI/GETTY IMAGES; LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES; SHA WELLNESS**

Holistic holidays, alternative therapy healing retreats, and meditation getaways

From reiki and sound healing to homeopathy and astrology readings, many holistic practices that were once considered too obscure to be found outside of a dedicated specialist have been making their way into the mainstream - and showing up in an increasing number of hotels and resorts around the world. Anantara Santorini Abu Dhabi Retreat's Wellness Sundays offers guests a morning session with yoga, breathwork, and a wellness breakfast. It also hosts sound healing sessions on the beach, while Anantara Mina Ras Al Khaimah Resort *(pictured top right)* has partnered with SOULFUL Wellness Group to offer treatments utilising Kloris CBD. Portugal's Casa Prema promises guests a sanctuary of peace and rejuvenation, with sound healing, energy work, and breathwork amidst five acres of nature, inside a wooden session dome, and with eight ensuite rooms, a communal kitchen, and a working fireplace. In Thailand, the award-winning RAKxa has now also launched the RXV Wellness Village: a state-of-the-art wellness hotel an hour from Bangkok, where guests can do cryotherapy, IV infusions, colon hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, pilates, sauna therapy, Thai medicine practices, and more. In Qatar, Zulal Wellness Retreat by Chiva-Som considers the whole family with its new Fit For Life, Thrive WIth Confidence, and Digital Detox retreats, that encourage families to connect on a deeper level, while addressing the specific well-being needs of its younger as well as older guests, and educating them with take-home learnings.

Medical tourism

Türkiye, Thailand, Mexico, Costa Rica, South Korea, the UAE, Switzerland, and Czechia are among the countries that have established a reputation as great destinations for medical tourism: travel that supports the procedures and ensuring recovery for medical care ministrations including hair transplants, cosmetic surgery, fertility treatments, dental treatments, mental or physical rehabilitation, stem cell therapy, and medical cosmetic skin enhancements.

Sleep retreats

Hotels across the world have started to wake up to the potential of the sleep retreat in recent years. Going beyond the pillow menu, they're investing in better (or tech-enhanced) mattresses, quieter and darker rooms that could provide guests with optimal sleep conditions, ways to measure and track sleep patterns, sleep-supporting wellness from Yoga Nidra to sound healing, and utilising everything from snooze-inducing audio to supplements that enhance quality shut-eye. Premier Inn continues to consult with a sleep expert and partner with a renowned mattress brand for their custom sleep-friendly bedding, and Jumeirah Dar Al Masyaf's Talise Spa *(pictured above)* has launched a Sleep Programme. Four Seasons took a deep dive by commissioning a White Paper on the power of rest (to explore regional sleep habits), while Equinox Hotels – which has announced a forthcoming location in Saudi – offers a dedicated sleep programme that even comes with some melatonin-infused patches.

IMAGES ANASTASIIA KRIVENOK/GETTY IMAGES; ANANTARA MINA RAS AL KHAIMAH RESORT; JUMEIRAH DAR AL MASYAF

Biohacking getaways

Loosely defined as a series of small but strategic enhancements that can be made to improve one's lifestyle and physical state – from weight management to cognitive health hacks – biohacking can involve anything from the use of adaptogenic supplements to technology-supported tools, such as red light therapy, devices that can calm the nervous system, and more. A number of hotels – such as Saudi Arabia's Six Senses Southern Dunes – have started offering treatments that offer guests a quick biohacking boost that can be added to a holiday itinerary in as little as 30 minutes. Some properties, such as SIRO One Za'abeel *(pictured below)*, have gone all-in on the idea, offering treatments that aren't just designed to be done once (although they can be), but that guests and residents alike can get the most out of through return visits. From cold plunges and infrared, plasma and oxygen therapy to cryotherapy or EMS, these treatments aid recovery, reduce inflammation, relieve fatigue, and beyond.

IMAGES LONGEVITY HUB; SIRO ONE ZA'ABEEL; WILPUNT/GETTY IMAGES

Longevity retreats

For some, biohacking is the gateway to longevity. While the former helps us to live better, stronger, smarter, and faster, the latter is the part that helps us do it all for longer, by extending a person's healthy lifespan. Clinique La Prairie is a global leader in the niche, with its pioneering Longevity Hubs (including one in Dubai, at the One&Only One Za'abeel (*pictured above*), and another in development at Saudi's Amaala), while Chenot Palace Weggis in Switzerland's Lake Lucerne is renowned for its world-class detox and longevity spa. Germany's Lanserhof Sylt has developed a cult-like following for its longevity programme, while Six Senses Ibiza – despite being on an island often associated with partying – encourages guests to slow down with its RoseBar Longevity Clinic. Another option is a Blue Zone retreat - one that mimics habits found in the world's "Blue Zones": places where people are said to live longer- and healthier-than-average lives. An official Blue Zone retreat will take place from 20-26 October 2025 in Okinawa, Japan.

Adventure travel

Travel that takes you out of your comfort zone can offer you a range of benefits. The physical exertion can reduce stress, boost circulation, and keep your muscles strong, while the mental benefits can include increased self-confidence and greater resilience. It can also reduce stress – and not just because these types of trips tend to take place in nature-filled environments, which various studies have emphatically claimed is good for us. Dubai-based Raw Earth guides guests through self-drive 4x4 expeditions through remote, rugged landscapes, while Antarctica expedition expert Patrick Woodhead, founder of White Desert, says adventure travel can be life-changing: "Guests arrive with their everyday concerns and limitations, and within days, they're doing things they never imagined possible. I've watched corporate executives discover inner strength they didn't know they had, seen people overcome deep fears, and witnessed moments of pure joy when someone experiences the Antarctic sunrise for the first time."

→

Spa holidays

The original, most long-serving form of wellness offering in most hotels, the spa break is not to be sneered at despite the growing amount of options under the "wellness tourism" umbrella. Massages offer a wide range of health benefits, from reduced muscle tension and relaxation to decreased pain, improved circulation, an ability to aid in sleep quality, detoxification through lymphatic drainage, and more, as well as enhanced recovery from exercise or soft tissue injuries. From deep tissue work and aromatherapy to facials and more, the appeal of the traditional spa treatment is still going strong, with current trends now seeing spas lean into offering more opportunities for customisation and personalisation, technology-enhanced experiences (such as VR-enhancements, or the use of light or sound to create a heightened sensory experience), and incorporating more ways to choose whether you want a solo experience or a chance to enjoy it with friends. Want to try it for yourself? Be Relax is now offering VR immersion alongside their massages, giving customers the chance to see a virtual world while having a "Be Feet" foot massage IRL in Dubai International Airport's Concourse A, B, C, and D. For a spa day with friends, Banyan Tree Dubai's Rainforest Experience *(pictured below)* can be booked for private use for up to four people at a time.

Slow-down breaks

The modern world can often feel quite overstimulating. Notifications tend to ping at us nonstop from our phones and our tablets, plus our chat messengers and our email inboxes – not to mention the brightly-lit advertisements popping up almost everywhere we go, from walking through the mall to driving down the highway. It can make it hard to focus, creating an opportunity for the destinations that help us make space for mindfulness to shine. This year, a global study by relaxation-centered brand Blakk Smoke scored a series of locations for their mindfulness potential out of 100 – revealing Sedona, Arizona, USA, at the top with a score of 92/100; Slovenia's Lake Bled second with 89/100, and England's Lake District third, with a score of 87/100. Also in the top 10 were Big Sur, California, US; Santorini, Greece; Scottish Highlands, Scotland; Asheville, NC, US; Amalfi Coast, Italy; Cornwall, England; and Kyoto, Japan; in that order. Even outside of these locations, "Calmcations" – retreats that aim to provide a sense of tranquility, through peaceful and quiet activities – can increasingly be found. In the UK, Starcroft Farm Cabins *(pictured left)* can be found just a 90-minute train ride outside of London, and while its three cozy stargazing cabins are typically used for writing retreats, it also offers reading retreats: a peaceful escape during which you can simply switch off from the world to read. They can even provide the book for you, hand-picked from the local independent bookshop. If you need a push, a digital detox retreat may be what you need: Eremito in Umbria, Italy, is in a former monastery on a hilltop with no wifi, phone signal, or TVs, while the Urban Cowboy Lodge in New York's Catskills Mountains not only has no cellphone signal, but also asks you to surrender your phone during your stay, as part of its Unplug and Play package.

Day trips

Can't take any leave days, or a vacation that involves major travel? A weekend day trip to a fresh location can feel like a micro-holiday. From hiking in the UAE's Hatta Mountains to a desert sound healing session at Bab Al Shams, a Rare Finds Desert Resort *(pictured below)*, a dose of wellness can be as simple as change to your daily routine. **BT**

IMAGES STARCROFT FARM CABINS; RAINFOREST EXPERIENCE; BAB AL SHAM

Soulful Sojourns

From mini-moons to maxi-moons – and single-moons, baby-moons, new-job-moons, and other celebratory, milestone-driven breaks – the traditional honeymoon period isn't just for romantic holidays anymore

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

It is sometimes said that the first month of marriage is the sweetest – and for some couples celebrating an upcoming union, the ceremonies that occur around the impending nuptials can inspire less excitement than what typically comes afterwards: the honeymoon.

The concept of the honeymoon dates way back – according to some research, they've been around since the 19th century, while other historical information suggests that the idea goes as far back as the fifth century. Either way, back in the day, the occasion wasn't so much about the couple in question going to a lavish resort to sip on colourful drinks by the pool while spending quality time together. Instead, it was an opportunity for wealthy couples to travel for a sort of post-wedding tour in which they would visit friends and family – particularly those who had not been able to attend the wedding. With these visits requiring time and travel, the tour could take as long as month, requiring the couple to take leave from their regular day-to-day life for an entire moon cycle.

But as the decades went by, and societal culture continued to evolve, the idea of the honeymoon changed with it. The term became less associated with a post-wedding tour, and instead became synonymous with a holiday in a luxurious location, where a couple could enjoy their first weeks of wedded bliss with as much intimacy, romance, and love as possible. Visits to friends and family transformed into the opposite – with honeymoons focusing on the couple retreating away from others, to spend quality time with only each other. The standard timeframe evolved into a two-week break. Then some people started taking just a week; others just a few days or even a weekend. In some cases, the couple would head home straight after the wedding, and take their honeymoon at a later date.

IMAGES **MNSTUDIO/ADOBE STOCK**

TOP
The Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort's private dining is a great pick for a honeymoon or a buddymoon

ABOVE
The spa baths with a fireplace at Château Eza, France, make for a romantic setting

OPPOSITE PAGE
Château Eza's nature-rich views and intimate feel also make for a great solomoon; The Lux Collective's LUX* Grand Baie is one of the group's six properties in Mauritius

The reasons varied: A changing work culture led to more people taking shorter holidays. More couples wanted to use it as an opportunity to validate a "once in a lifetime" trip – resulting in more travel to far-flung locations, which could require a separate vacation to accommodate the longer trip. Meanwhile, as the travel and tourism industry continued to evolve and respond in kind, couples could choose from increasingly easy travel options, with faster and more affordable airline routes, and greater choices of tourism packages, expanding the flexibility of a honeymoon further. And as more people started planning these trips around factors other than the wedding itself – untying themselves from the idea that this celebratory journey must be taken literally after the ceremony – the concept of the "moon" break evolved as well.

Celebrating in an experiential world

Some of the world's most popular honeymoon destinations include the Maldives, Santorini, Maui, Bora Bora, Fiji, Italy, Paris, the Seychelles, and Thailand. In 2025, Mauritius was named the world's best honeymoon destination in TripAdvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards, while Bali is still statistically the highest-trending. With St. Lucia offering one of the largest concentrations of adults-only hotels in the world, it continues to be another popular destination for travellers seeking a place to focus first and foremost on their love for each other. All of these places offer a few key things in common: a breathtaking romantic backdrop, excellent options for enjoying life (from tasty cuisine to flowing drinks and indulgent spas), and plenty to do. Yet these aren't factors that only a couple would enjoy – single or otherwise.

In recent years, destination weddings have been on the rise, and it's expected to keep growing, with the market value predicted to be worth US$78.9 billion by 2027. This can be attributed to multiple factors. A destination wedding is often smaller than one at home, with fewer people typically able to fly there. It can also help a couple conveniently escape more of the "obligatory" invites that tend to come with a wedding closer to their home, work, or family. It opens up a whole world of new choices, full of stunning settings beyond what you might find at home. And although the idea of travelling overseas for a wedding might sound more lavish, a destination wedding can also offer a couple more bang for their buck, whether due to a favourable exchange rate, or the fact that the wedding can feel like it doubles as a vacation. With people thus travelling a long way to celebrate the happy couple, the newlyweds-to-be will often arrange an itinerary for their guests, who may also want to use the trip as an opportunity for a holiday. And with groups of close friends, many remain after the wedding to continue the celebrations together.

Unlike in the old days, where the honeymoon was the first time a couple would really spend an extended period of time alone together, modern couples who already live together can use it as a chance to celebrate and spend quality time with their mutual friends. According to a 2024 survey by online wedding company Hitched, a fifth of couples that are planning to get married would consider inviting their friends on their honeymoon. The idea of bringing your friends on your honeymoon has been quietly growing in popularity for the past decade, and has now become so popular that it's earned its own name: the buddymoon. For hotels, the buddymoon is a fantastic way to boost a booking, since it means more rooms, a higher spend on F&B, and more people to organise activities for, from pool days to stargazing sessions, and excursions, from boat trips to cooking classes, adventure trips, and more.

In some cases, these friends will break away into smaller groups to continue their own holidays. And you don't have to wait for an engaged couple to invite you to their wedding to

IMAGES ANANTARA HOTELS AND RESORTS; CHÂTEAU EZA

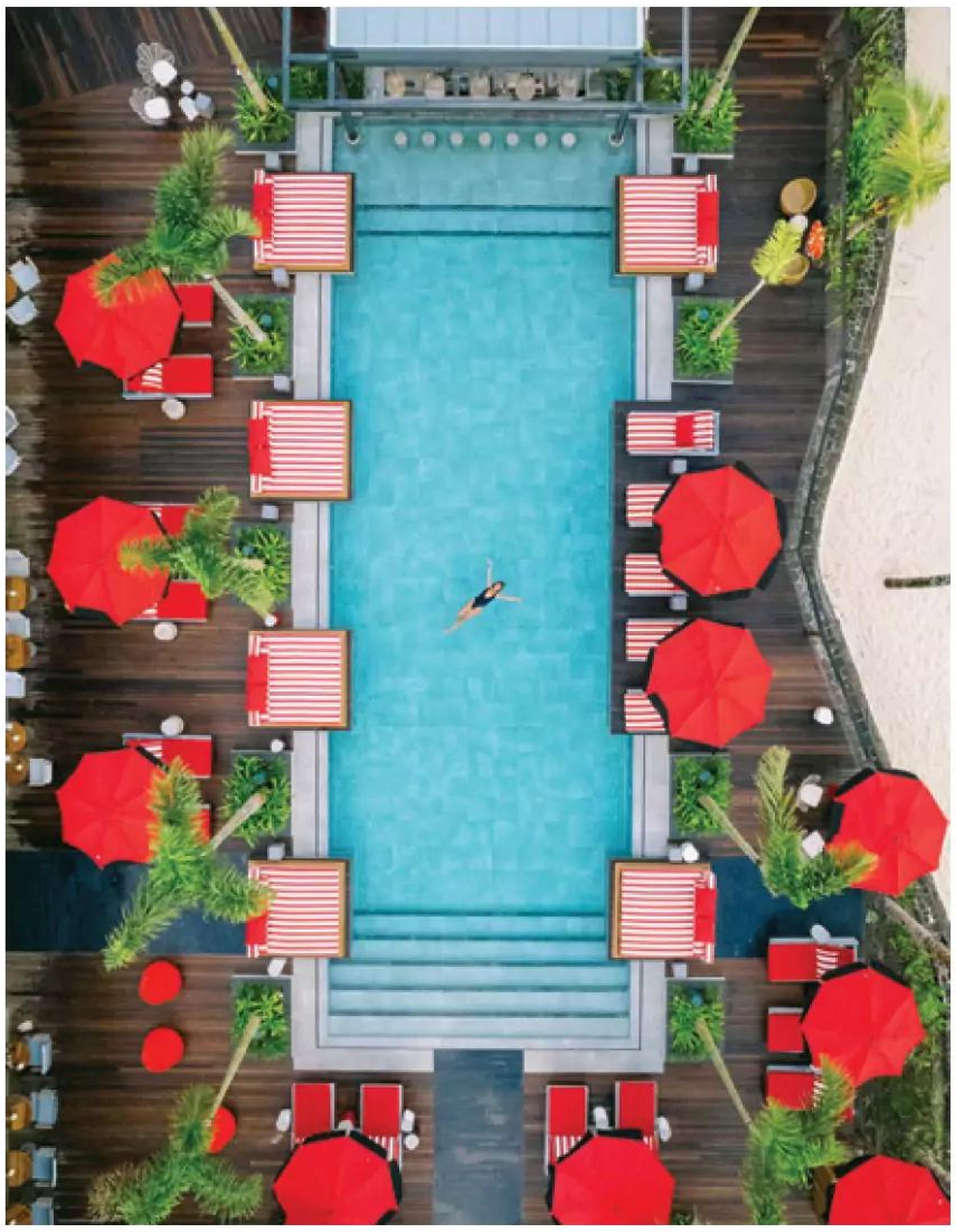
take a buddymoon, either: you can just plan one with your friends outright. In 2016, an American film called *Buddymoon* was released, depicting the story of a man dumped by his fiancé just before his wedding. Rather than seeing the groom mope, his best man suggested they go on his already-planned honeymoon together instead, turning it into an opportunity for healing rather than letting it go to waste – an idea that would also make sense in real life.

So what differentiates a buddymoon from a regular vacation? It's about the purpose of the trip. A holiday with friends is primarily fuelled by the idea of seeing and experiencing a new place together. A buddymoon, however, is about bonding, through experiences that strengthen the friendship on a deeper level. In some cases, the relationship with one's friends is so highly valued that a newlywed couple will temporarily separate to head off on holiday with their individual friends.

Meanwhile, as honeymoons evolved into a chance to experience that a "bucket list" trip, a new complication arose: some couples have a very different idea of what that dream trip would be. Enter the solomoon: wherein a newly-married couple will go on holiday shortly after their wedding *without* their spouse. A solomoon can offer each person in a couple the benefits of solo travel – which can promote personal growth, self-discovery, and a sense of self-nourishment – before they return home to each other to begin their next chapter happier and less stressed.

Romanticising your life - and your travel

Over time, the concepts of the buddymoon and solomoon also began to expand. Single and with no plans for marriage? You can still go on a honeymoon – just take yourself on a solomoon instead. You can even call it a me-moon if you want to. Do you wish to visit the world's most romantic destinations with someone you love, even if it's someone you love platonically? Take your bestie on a buddymoon. Had a bad breakup, and celebrating the fact that you're back on the market? A singlemoon may be the answer. Following the 2020 pandemic, a trend of "romanticising your life" began to emerge. The concept encouraged people to find idealistic joy and beauty in everyday moments, rather than only waiting for special occasions or grand gestures to do so – once again cementing the idea that the honeymoon isn't just reserved for couples, let alone just-married ones.



IMAGES **CHÂTEAU EZA; LUX COLLECTIVE**

A key difference between a "moon" holiday and a regular trip, then, appears to be how much you can romanticise it. It's the ultimate form of celebration, where you can look at any milestone you wish through a lens of sheer joy, gratitude, and presence. Got a new job? Take yourself on a "job moon" before you start, so you can come back and begin it feeling truly refreshed and ready. Just got engaged? Take an engagementmoon. Planning a wedding, and want a little time-out to de-stress before the big event? Book yourself into an earlymoon. Need some quality time with your bestie? Suggest a buddymoon. Wish you could ditch the idea of a typical wedding and just rent a villa with your entire family, where you'll marry your partner on one day, but hang out with the fam for the rest? Consider a familymoon. Or perhaps you're a maximalist, and rather than one major trip, you'd prefer to take one quick break after the wedding (called a minimoon, by the way), followed by many more of these throughout the entire year after. If so, the manymoon might be right for you. There's even something called a mysterymoon – where a couple hires a third party to plan a surprise honeymoon for them, ready to be wowed by the mystery box holiday waiting post-wedding. If your care for the environment and planet is just as important as your love for your partner, an ecomoon – a trip centered around eco-friendly hotels and activities, that supports local communities – may be right for you. Or if you like volunteering together, why not book a volunteermoon, where your trip focuses on aiding others? From culturemoons and fitnessmoons to adventuremoons, healingmoons, and more, the meaning of this new trend is clear: it's less about the rebranding and the cutesy names, and more about celebrating your most special moments in a way that aligns with your specific passions. Combining that type of joy with your love of travel may be the ultimate way to romanticise your life. **BT**

Oh baby!

One of the earliest riffs on the idea of a traditional honeymoon came about in the early 1990s, when British author, anthropologist, and natural childbirth expert Sheila Kitzinger coined the term "babymoon". At first, it was used to describe a period of calm, uninterrupted time where parents could bond with a newborn baby after birth; but as time went by, the idea expanded to include a relaxing holiday where an expectant couple could enjoy their time together as parents-to-be before the baby is born. Now, the term "mummymoon" is also used to mean a vacation taken by mothers, whether alone or with their children, to relax and recharge or bond more, at various stages of motherhood.

First impressions

British Airways has unveiled the design of its new first class seat with privacy doors. The seats won't be in skies until next year, but here's a sneak peek of what to expect

New York
on board
from here

SOCIALISE
In centre aisle seats, the privacy divider can be slid open, while a multi-purpose ottoman and stowable table mean passengers can dine with companions

STORAGE
Overhead compartments have been replaced with personal wardrobes outside of the suite and luggage storage under the ottoman

IFE
Catch the latest entertainment on a 32-inch 4K screen. This can be operated with a wireless tablet, where you can also control things like seat settings, window blinds (there are three per window seat) and lighting

AMBIENCE
New mood lighting can be set to "relax", "dine", and "cinema", while adjustable air vents are a welcome reintroduction

THE SEAT
Arranged in a 1-2-1 configuration, seats will be much wider (36.5 inches) and longer, with a bed length of 79 inches

PRIVACY
Each seat is set within a 60-inch curved wall, with neutral slats resembling Venetian blinds, while a fixed privacy door offers a suite-like feel. Soft panelling on the inside absorbs sound to improve the cocoon ambience, and a digital 'Do Not Disturb' notice displays on the outside of the suite to alert cabin crew

SNACKS
Drinks and nibbles can be found in a compartment with a sliding door

TECH
Expect a wireless charging panel, multiple plug sockets and USB charging ports, plus Bluetooth connectivity for headphones

GOOD -TO- KNOW

The new first class suites are set to debut on BA's A380 aircraft from mid-2026, which serve Dubai, Johannesburg, multiple US cities, and Singapore. This will be followed by the Boeing 777-9 aircraft once delivered

THE ART OF WELLNESS

WORDS VIVIENNE TANG

EXECS REQUIRING A LITTLE TLC NEED LOOK NO FURTHER THAN ASIA'S FIRST-CLASS SPA RESORTS

ASIA SHINES AS a haven for wellness enthusiasts, effortlessly blending centuries-old traditions with contemporary luxury. Often set against breathtaking landscapes, these retreats offer unparalleled opportunities for relaxation and renewal. With its rich heritage of holistic healing, Asia has become a global leader in transformative wellness experiences.

Travellers from around the world are drawn to these sanctuaries for their ability to rejuvenate the body, mind, and soul. From the serene heights of the Himalayas to lush tropical havens, each destination promises more than a retreat – it's a gateway to profound self-care and restoration.

Tailored wellness journeys, expert therapies, and awe-inspiring settings define these sanctuaries of transformation. We explore the top eight wellness retreats in Asia, each setting new standards in luxury and holistic healing. Whether you're looking for tranquillity or a revitalising escape, these retreats offer an unforgettable path to renewal and well-being.

BREATHE Peace and meditation at TIA Wellness Resort, Vietnam

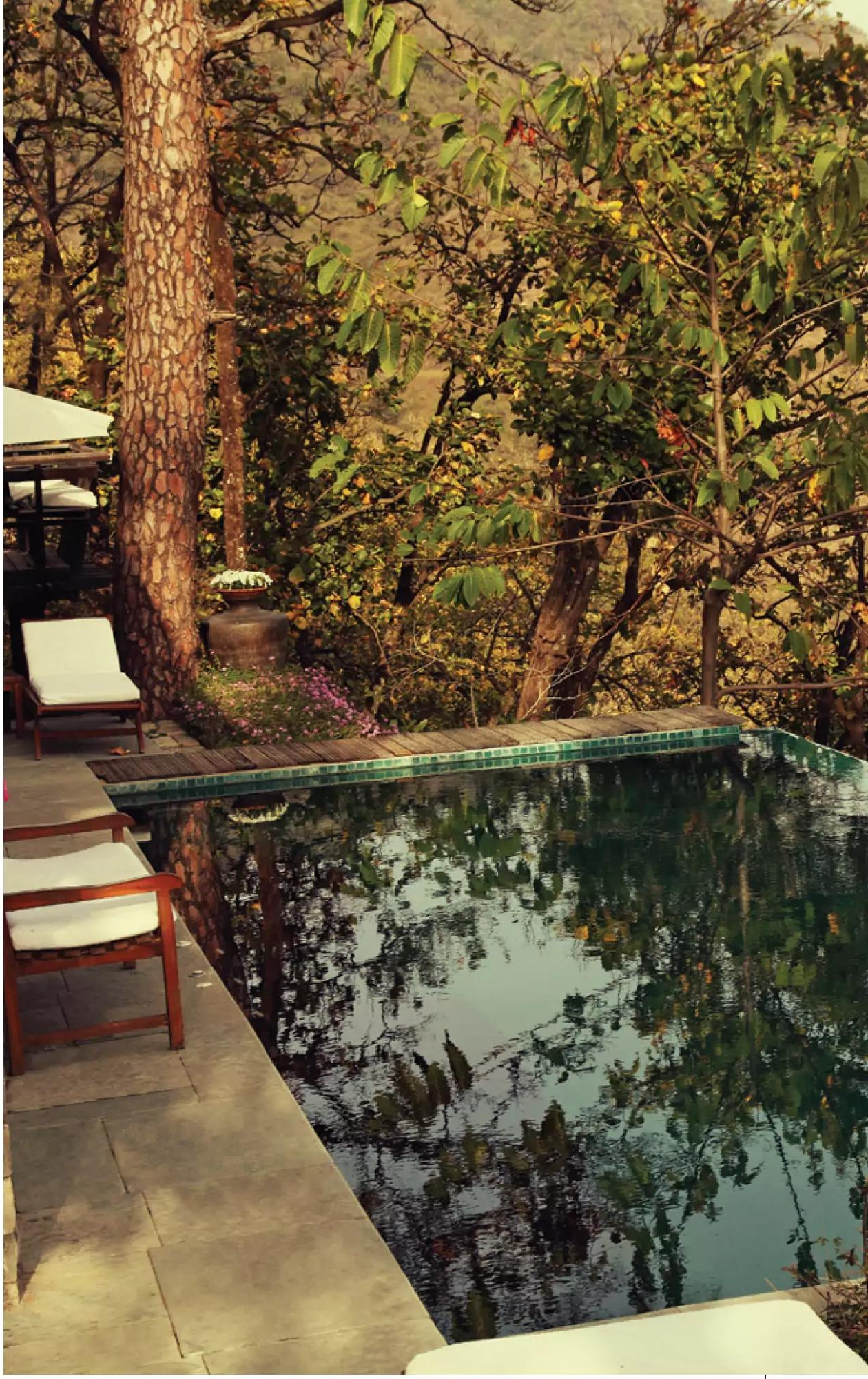
ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS

UTTARANKHAND, INDIA

NESTLED IN THE tranquil Himalayan foothills, Ananda in the Himalayas is a world-renowned retreat that embodies India's ancient wellness philosophies, blending Ayurveda, yoga, and meditation to create a transformative experience. Each guest embarks on a bespoke journey designed to address their unique health and wellness aspirations, under the guidance of leading experts in holistic healing. The retreat's setting, with panoramic views of the sacred Ganges River and the spiritual landscapes of Rishikesh, amplifies the serenity and deep connection to nature. Ananda's comprehensive wellness programmes prioritise physical, mental, and spiritual renewal, offering therapies that range from detoxification to stress management and mindfulness practices. Whether pursuing Ayurvedic rejuvenation, improving vitality, or finding inner balance, guests are immersed in a sanctuary that harmonises modern luxury with ancient traditions.

anandaspa.com

PLUNGE POOL Ananda in the Himalayas (right) makes the most of India's rich tradition of healing and well-being **BELOW:** Tropical beauty at Kamalaya



KAMALAYA

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

Kamalaya, an award-winning wellness sanctuary on the lush tropical island of Koh Samui, offers a tranquil refuge for those yearning to reconnect and revitalise. Renowned for its integrative approach, Kamalaya seamlessly blends ancient Eastern healing traditions with cutting-edge Western wellness research to craft transformative programmes tailored to individual needs. Whether focusing on stress management or overcoming burnout, guests are supported by serene gardens, pristine beaches, and the expertise of compassionate practitioners.

Kamalaya elevates the wellness experience with its phenomenal health cuisine. Designed to nourish the body and delight the palate, the menus feature wholesome, flavourful dishes crafted from fresh, locally-sourced ingredients. These meals are carefully curated to complement the retreat's wellness goals. Kamalaya's holistic philosophy makes every stay a meaningful journey of transformation.

kamalaya.com

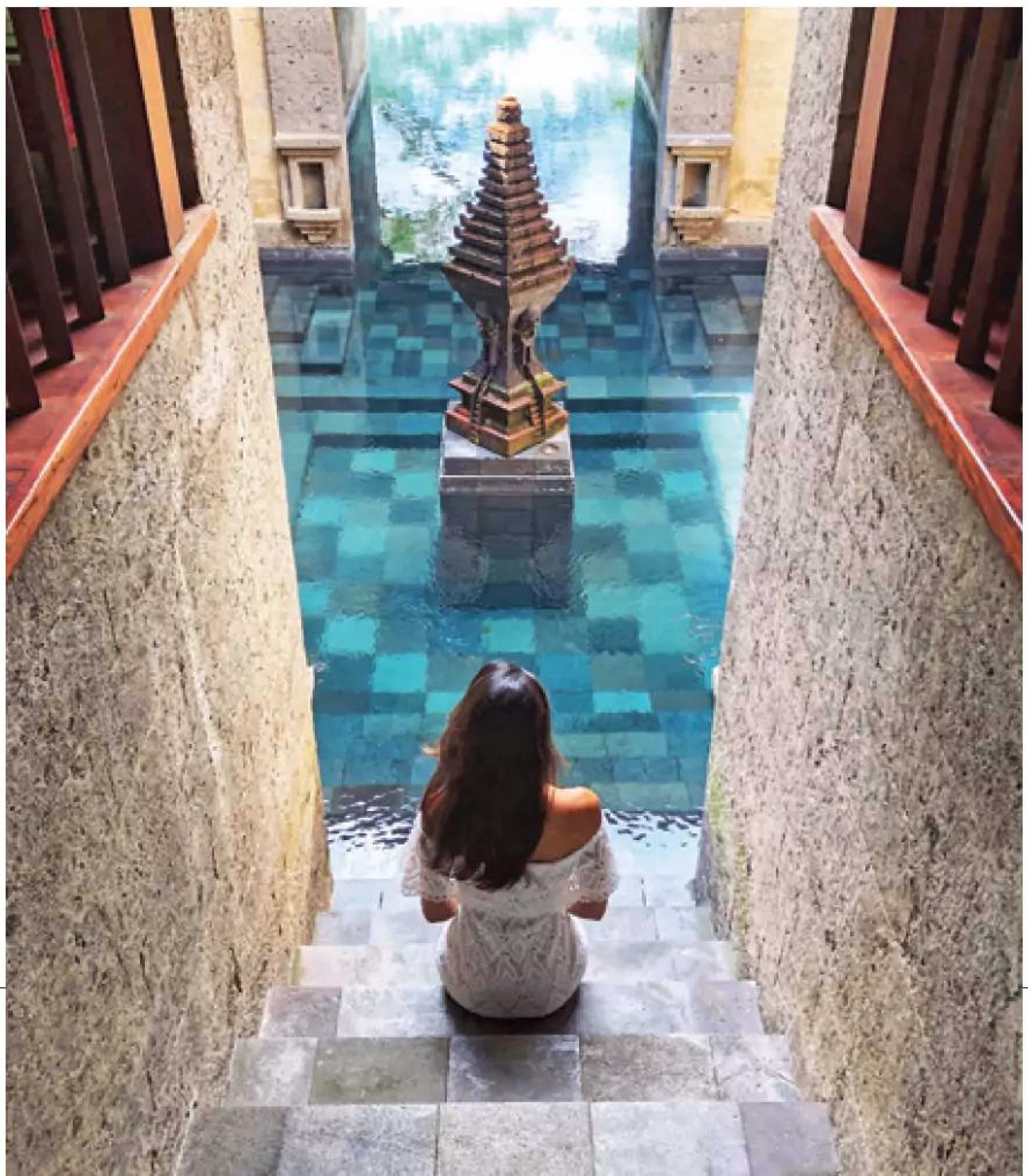
IMAGE (LEFT) **DESTINATION DELUXE**

HEALTH FARM The Farm at San Benito (top right) takes a modern approach to wellness **BELOW LEFT:** Healing waters play an important role at Como Shambhala Estate

THE FARM AT SAN BENITO

BATANGAS, PHILIPPINES

The Farm at San Benito is a world-class medical wellness retreat nestled amid the lush coconut groves of Batangas, Philippines. Fusing modern diagnostics with holistic healing, the retreat offers a comprehensive range of programmes focused on detoxification, stress reduction, chronic disease management and overall well-being. Guests are guided through bespoke wellness journeys, supported by plant-based cuisine, luxurious accommodation and expert-led therapies. Fitness activities, mindfulness practices and rejuvenating spa treatments further enhance the experience. The Farm's emphasis on science-backed wellness solutions ensures each programme is tailored to individual needs. The retreat fosters a sense of serenity, empowering guests to embark on a path toward long-lasting vitality. ***thefarmatsanbenito.com***



COMO SHAMBHALA ESTATE

BALI, INDONESIA

Set amid the lush greenery of Ubud, Como Shambhala Estate is an exquisite retreat dedicated to holistic wellness and rejuvenation. Renowned for its transformative approach, this luxury sanctuary combines expert consultations, personalised wellness programmes and immersive nature experiences to foster healing and vitality.

A highlight of the estate is its natural rock pools, fed by healing spring waters said to possess restorative properties. Guests are invited to bathe in these serene pools, enhancing the detoxification process and promoting deep relaxation. Complementing these natural offerings are hydrotherapy treatments, yoga sessions and tailored nutritional guidance, ensuring each stay is uniquely crafted to individual wellness goals.

Surrounded by lush forests, flowing rivers and tranquil landscapes, Como Shambhala Estate offers a nurturing space for detoxification, stress recovery or personal growth.

comoshambhala.com

IMAGE (RIGHT) DESTINATION DELUXE

FIVELEMENTS RETREAT

BALI, INDONESIA

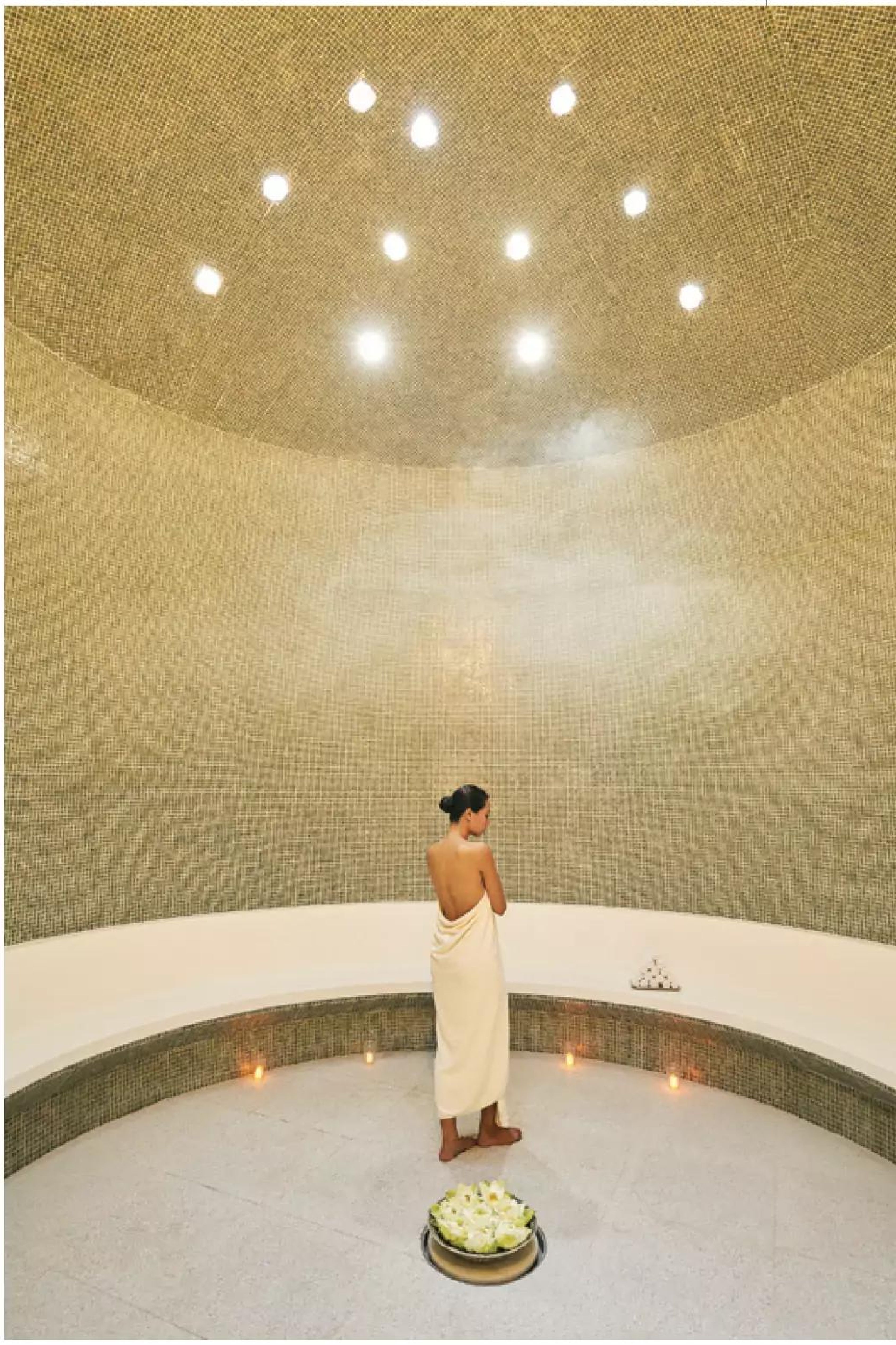
● Located along the sacred Ayung River in Ubud, Fivelements Retreat is an eco-luxury sanctuary that blends traditional Balinese healing practices with modern wellness. This retreat offers a profound healing experience through natural therapies, plant-based nutrition, and sacred arts. Guests can immerse themselves in traditional ceremonies, including powerful fire ceremonies, water blessings, and rejuvenating spa treatments, all within its bamboo-crafted, sustainable setting. Balinese healers guide guests through rituals and holistic therapies, helping them achieve physical, emotional, and spiritual balance. The retreat is renowned for its commitment to sustainability, using eco-friendly materials and practices throughout the property. Its serene environment fosters a deep connection to nature, making it a sanctuary for personal transformation. Fivelements Retreat focuses on harmonising body, mind, and soul, offering an authentic and transformative wellness journey that is rooted in Bali's treasured ancient traditions, while nurturing each guest's well-being in a truly special space. *fivelementsbali.com*

NATURAL HAVEN Sustainability lies at the heart of the offerings at Fivelements Retreat, Bali, an eco-luxury sanctuary **RIGHT:** The Bathing Pavilion's steam room at Chiva-Som

CHIVA-SOM

HUA HIN, THAILAND

● **Chiva-Som, situated in the peaceful seaside town of Hua Hin, Thailand, has been a pioneer in holistic wellness for over two decades. This renowned, award-winning retreat offers a range of personalised programmes that cater to diverse health needs, including detox, weight management, stress relief, and sleep enhancement. Set against the backdrop of pristine beaches, Chiva-Som combines the best of luxury and cutting-edge wellness therapies, such as acupuncture, physiotherapy, and an extensive selection of rejuvenating spa treatments. Guests benefit from bespoke wellness plans, devised by experts and tailored to their unique needs. The retreat's state-of-the-art facilities, serene environment and focus on sustainable living create the ideal setting for deep relaxation and long-lasting well-being.** ***chivasom.com***



REVIVO WELLNESS RESORT

BALI, INDONESIA

Situated in the lush landscapes of Nusa Dua, Revivo Wellness Resort is a sanctuary for emotional and mental rejuvenation. Its name, meaning "to revive", reflects its mission to restore balance through tailored programmes focusing on yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. The retreat's tranquil setting, combined with luxurious amenities and expert-led therapies, fosters deep self-reflection and healing. Guests can enjoy nutrient-rich meals, spa treatments, and workshops designed to cultivate inner peace and happiness. Revivo's holistic approach provides the tools to sustain a harmonious and healthy lifestyle long after the retreat has ended.

Revivo's wellness offerings are being further enhanced with the recent launch of the Vitality Centre (which opened in early 2025). This cutting-edge facility focuses on personalised longevity protocols and advanced diagnostics aimed at optimising health and vitality. Guests have access to cutting-edge services, including hormone testing, blood chemistry analysis, and rejuvenating therapies. The centre represents the resort's commitment to combining innovation with traditional wellness practices, ensuring a transformative experience for all who visit. *revivoresorts.com*

MIRROR IMAGE Private Pool Villa at Revivo Wellness Resort **RIGHT:** Yoga and quiet reflection at TIA Wellness Resort

TIA WELLNESS RESORT

DA NANG, VIETNAM

TIA Wellness Resort redefines luxury with its innovative approach to well-being, seamlessly integrating active wellness into everyday life. Located on Da Nang's pristine coastline, this all-inclusive retreat offers workshops, spa treatments and wellness programmes that empower guests to embrace a healthier lifestyle. TIA's Wellness Inclusive programme guarantees two wellness treatments per night from an extensive menu of therapies. Guests also enjoy daily wellness practices, including Signature Master Classes in Breathwork, Vinyasa Yoga Flow, HIIT Power Workouts and Creative Workshops, fostering both physical vitality and personal growth. With its breathtaking beach setting, luxurious villas and tailored wellness journeys, TIA provides an experience that nurtures creativity, life purpose, and overall well-being. TIA's commitment to holistic health makes it an ideal retreat for those looking to integrate wellness into their daily lives. *tiawellnessresort.com* **BT**

Vivienne Tang is the founder of *Destination Deluxe*, a leading wellness and travel authority that curates the finest resorts, retreats, spas and beauty brands for the global nomad. With over 25 years of experience in lifestyle publishing, Tang has established herself as a prominent figure in the wellness and travel industries. A seasoned speaker, she frequently shares her expertise at prestigious events, including the Global Wellness Summit, the World Spa & Wellness Asia, and the Female Entrepreneurs Worldwide platform.

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

WITH FLYING COLOURS

The region's airlines have been busy adding an ever-growing list of exciting new destinations, many accessible by direct flight. Here are some on our radar

WORDS YI-HWA HANNA

IMAGES FEI YANG/GETTY IMAGES; ZIGRES/ADOBE STOCK

Shenzhen & Guangzhou, CHINA

STARTING ON 1 July, Emirates is launching flights to Shenzen, China. The third largest city in China (after Shanghai and Beijing) in terms of urban population, the technologically-advanced city is known for its contemporary buildings, plentiful shopping destinations, and large number of manufacturing and software companies – and it's now one of the most expensive cities in the world globally. The new Emirates route will fly there daily, making it the UAE airline's fourth hub in China. The flight will be operated on a Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, with eight first-class suites, 40 lie-flat business class seats, 24 premium economy seats, and 260 economy seats.

Another major city in China, Guangzhou, will also get more traffic from the MENAT region with Turkish Airlines recently having expanded their number of flights there from Istanbul. Air Astana also has its eyes on the Chinese port city – the fifth most populous in the country in terms of urban resident population – with a new direct flight there from Almaty having launched in March this year, flying three times a week. Guangzhou is known for its avant-garde architecture, including the Zaha Hadid-designed opera house (known as the "double pebble"), Canton Tower, Guangdong Museum, Guangdong Olympic Stadium, Guangzhou Circle, Guangzhou Library, Sunac Guangzhou Grand Theater, Parc Central, and Nansha International Cruise Terminal Complex.

Vilnius, LITHUANIA

THE CAPITAL of Lithuania is also the largest in the country, and its beautiful baroque architecture offers a charming place for a memorable trip. There is plenty to see and do in its picturesque Old Town, where many historical styles can been seen amidst its cobblestoned streets, from Gothic to Baroque, Renaissance, and Neoclassical styles. The city is also a great jumping-off point for numerous day trips, including to the iconic Trakai Castle and Aukštaitija National Park. Exploring the country – filled with beautiful cafés, and the chance to buy wooden handicrafts, jewellery, local breads and cheeses, and more – is about to get a whole lot easier, with a new direct flight from Dubai launching with flydubai this winter. The new route will be the UAE airline's debut to Lithuania – joining Air Baltic, which launched direct flights on this route in 2023. The latter will also be increasing the frequency of their flights offered on this route this winter. Earlier this year, Vilnius Airport revealed a new departure terminal.

→

Varna, BULGARIA

IN APRIL, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi inaugurated two new flight routes: to Varna, Bulgaria, and Bucharest, Romania. The launch of these routes made the ultra-low-fare airline the only carrier operating direct flights between the UAE and Varna. Varna, often called a "Pearl of the Black Sea," offers a mix of golden beaches, Roman ruins, and lively seaside resorts. "Our new route to Varna is a first for the region, enhancing connectivity and making travel more accessible than ever," said said Johan Eidhagen, Managing Director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi. The coastal city has plenty to see, including the Sea Garden (aka Primorski Park), the Varna Archaeological Museum, the Roman Thermae, and the Dormition of the Mother of God Cathedral. Within the Archeological Museum, one popular exhibit is the "Gold of Varna" – the oldest gold treasure and jewellery in the world, dating from 4,600 BC to 4,200 BC. The 6,000-year-old Thracian jewelry was discovered in a local necropolis (which is still not yet fully excavated) by accident by an excavator operator in 1972.

Taipei, TAIWAN

THIS METROPOLIS can already be accessed via direct flights from Dubai, through Emirates – and now, thanks to the upcoming launch of a direct route from Abu Dhabi to Taipei by Etihad, access from the Middle East will be easier than ever. The inaugural flight from the Abu Dhabi carrier is set to take off from 7 September 2025, running daily on a Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft – which features Etihad's state-of-the-art Business Studio cabins. Taipei is beloved for its rich, exciting food scene and excellent shopping, as well as a wide variety of sights and activities, from night markets to nature hikes, and the vibrant city life supporting its thriving commercial landscape. The island – which is described as bearing the shape of a sweet potato or tobacco leaf – has a unique topography that boasts the highest mountain density of any country within the same climate zone, meaning it has the largest concentration of high-peaked mountains in a relatively small place. Its diverse landscape includes beaches, forests, lakes, and unique geological wonders.

Nairobi, KENYA

OFTEN USED AS A KEY setting-off point for travellers visiting the stunning Maasai Mara National Reserve – one of the most epic safari destinations in the world, which is about an hour away from Nairobi – Kenya's capital is a brilliant destination in its own right. The largest city in the country, it is a rapidly-growing and increasingly-vital business hub in the African continent, making it a progressively important stop for business travellers. For tourists, it's the only capital city in the world with a national park that is within its official boundaries. Nairobi National Park offers the chance to see endangered black rhinos, as well as giraffes, zebras, lions, rhinos, and various species of antelope. Global hotel brands' interest in the destination is heightened, including the opening of Hyatt Hotels & Resorts' debut property in the counry – Hyatt Regency Nairobi Westlands – in February. In March, low-cost Omani carrier SalamAir launched direct flights between Muscat to Nairobi, while Gulf Air launched the first-ever direct route between Bahrain and Nairobi this June.

IMAGES RICHIE CHAN, VARNA, BULGARIA, BERTRAND GODFROID/ADOBE STOCK

Sochi, RUSSIA

WIDELY KNOWN GLOBALLY for being the host city of the 2014 Winter Olympics, this Russian city that stretches along the northestern coast of the Black Sea is also beloved by those in the know, as an excellent summer beach resort destination. In the winter, it offers fantastic oportunities for snow-based activities such as skiing, ice-skating, snowmobiling, and more – after which you could even technically make it to the beach elsewhere, though it would be pretty cold for swimming. In the summer, however, Sochi's beaches come alive, with its warm and sunny days making it a great environment for swimming, boating, and other water-based activities. During the winter, ski resort Krasnaya Polyana is a prime destination with a base elevation of 560m and a thriving après-ski scene, but in summer, the resort transforms into a green nature hub with plenty of lush hiking routes, opportunities for mountain biking, and more. In 2019, flydubai became the first UAE-based airline to launch direct flights to Sochi, and in 2024, low-cost Emirati airline Air Arabia announced direct flights between Sharjah International Airport and Sochi International Airport from summer 2025. The route commenced on 27 June this year, now taking place with three flights a week, making it the sixth Russian destination served with a direct Air Arabia flight from Sharjah. Kuwait's low-cost carrier Jazeera Airways is also launching direct flights to Sochi for the summer 2025 season, from Kuwait City.

IMAGES MARCIN JUCH, PICTURELLARIOUS/ADOBE STOCK

Santiago, CHILE

CALLED BOTH Santiago de Chile and, simply, Santiago, the capital and largest city of this South American destination offers visitors a beautiful blend of modern skyscrapers, colonial architecture, and old neighbourhoods rich with historical appeal. Many of the world's most spectacular wonders can be accessed in Chile, with mountains, volcanic treks, the chance to see the jaw-dropping salt flats of the Atacama Desert, go surfing, explore the spectacular Torres del Paine of the Patagonia region, and more. In the city, a stellar food scene and plenty of culture, from numerous art galleries to museums, awaits. Turkish Airlines commenced flights from Istanbul to Santiago in December 2024, and while the flights are not direct (they travel via São Paulo), the route marks the carrier's 126th destination in the Americas. Considering it's a rather long flight, the stopover could be a welcome break on the route - which now operates four times a week.

→

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

NICKNAMED THE "political capital of Africa", Addis Ababa is home to the headquarters of the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. There is plenty of history to be explored in the city, with key attractions including the Ethnological Museum, National Museum, St. George Cathedral & Museum, The Africa Unbound Museum, The Zoological Natural History Museum, the Ethiopian Science museum, The Red Terror Martyrs' Memorial, The Zoma Museum Mekanisa, and more. Take a break from museum-hopping by stretching your legs in Unity Park, or hitting the Mercato Market, where you can buy everything from clothing and handicrafts to spices, coffee, and more. Ethiopia's coffee is one of its most famous exports, and this is one of the largest open-air markets in Africa, meaning it's equally well worth a visit, and the type of trip that one should be adequately prepared for in terms of energy. Air Arabia,launched a nonstop route to Addis Ababa from Sharjah on 30 January 2025, and now flies there aboard an Airbus A320 three times a week. From the UAE capital, following a landmark codeshare agreement between Ethiopian Airlines and Etihad, the former will commence services from Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport to Addis Ababa Bole International Airport from 15 July, while the latter will introduce daily flights to Addis Ababa from 1 October.

London, UK

ENGLAND'S CAPITAL has long held plenty of appeal for tourists from across the Middle East, and this year, a record number of visitors are expected to travel to the United Kingdom from the GCC. Reflecting this continuing appeal, and the increasing significance of travellers from the region, Virgin Atlantic launched its first-ever direct flights between London Heathrow and Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport this year. The inaugural flight took off on 30 March, 2025, served on an Airbus A330-900neo aircraft, and now takes place daily. The flights also offer 30 tonnes of cargo capacity. The UK-founded airline has previously stated that it plans to deepen its ties to Saudi Arabia through a potential partnership with the Saudi-born Riyadh Air when the latter begins operations later this year. Although official announcements have yet to be made regarding any codeshares, the two airlines have already signed an agreement to strengthen their mutual connectivity, with a Strategic Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding having been signed in Riyadh in September 2024.

Siem Reap & Phnom Penh, CAMBODIA

IMAGES OF SIEM REAP, which is located in Northweatern Cambodia, are decidedly among the most iconic in the world, due to the resort town being home to the ruins of Angkor Wat. The stunning temple and its unique architecture, found within the ancient Khmer capital city, is now considered the eighth wonder of the world, and the complex is nothing short of majestic. The intricately created stone temples, curious carvings (including giant, stone faces) and complex history of this stunning UNESCO World Heritage Site are a major tourist attraction, welcoming more than 2.5 million visitors per year. Originally built for a king in the 12th century, it has been used as both a Hindu as well as a Buddhist temple, and is considered by some to be the largest faith-centered structure in the world. Emirates now flies to the destination, having launched a route from Dubai International Airport to Siem Reap Angkor International Airport, via Bangkok, on 3 June. The UAE carrier operates the route three times a week, on a wide-body Boeing 700-300ER aircraft. Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, also has touristic appeal with plenty of beautiful pagodas, historical sites, and cultural attractions. Etihad Airways will begin direct flights from Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport to Phnom Penh International Airport from 3 October, while Turkish Airlines will commence flights there from Istanbul from 10 December, travelling three times a week via Bangkok. The new destination will make Cambodia the 11th city served by the Türkiye flag carrier in Southeast Asia. Travellers keen to visit both cities can travel between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap by ferry (4-6 hours), plane (45 mins), or bus (4-6 hours).

IMAGES STUART MONK, RUDIERNST/ADOBESTOCK

DO NOT CLIMB

IMAGES **NAUGHTYNUT, DBVIRAGO/ADOBE STOCK**

Atlanta, USA

THIS CITY IN GEORGIA, in the southeastern United States, has plenty of beautiful outdoor attractions, a comfortable climate, historical sites, oustanding food, and an easy-to-use public transport system. It's becoming an increasingly popular place to live in the US, and is a growing area of interest for business travel for domestic and international visitors alike. Etihad Airways launches direct flights there on 2 July, starting with four flights a week, before expanding the route to daily flights from 1 November 2025. Due to its strategic location as a gateway to North America, the new route will also offer plenty of onward connections through Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport – which is also the world's busiest airport. If you're actually going into Atlanta, you'd be remiss not to take advantage of its famed Southern hospitality. The city is also highly regarded for its cuisine, with lemon-pepper wings, Coca-Cola, and popular food chain Chick-fil-A originally hailing from there. Having played a key role in the Civil War and the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, there are plenty of history-rich sights to explore – along with its Centennial Olympic Park (built for the 1996 Olympics), its botanical gardeen, and the huge aquarium. **BT**

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HOTEL REVIEWS

Anantara Layan Phuket Resort + Heritage Grand Perast by Rixos + Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, The Palm, Dubai

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Mausam Restaurant

Review

Putting business travel to the test

IMAGE ANANTARA LAYAN PHUKET RESORT

HOTEL REVIEW

Anantara Layan Phuket Resort

Stay, play, work, and reclaim your health at this beautiful resort that's just as renowned for its award-winning leisure as it is for its Layan Life wellness facility

HOTEL Review

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

What's it like?

This stunning resort has 77 rooms, suites, and villas, and is a 20-minute drive away from Phuket International Airport – yet its layout makes it feels surprisingly intimate. Its location, adjacent to Sirinat National Park, is also delightfully quiet, with an enveloped feel that makes you feel happily lost from the noise of town – that's actually a quick drive away.

The hotel has won awards including best boutique hotel, best spa hotel, best resort, and traveller's choice, and it was prominently featured in the destination wedding Netflix film *Mother of the Bride*. Unsurprisingly, it's also a popular pick for destination weddings – but with the recent introduction of the hotel's Layan Life wellness facility (which opened last year), it's now also an excellent choice for a world-class wellness experience that can be customised as you need. This can be booked flexibly, either with a dedicated stay focused on your health with a full well-being itinerary, or as a part-wellness, part-leisure trip. Balance is the name of the game, and it follows its own philosophy as much as it advises its guests to do the same: You'll find a wellness menu at some of its key dining venues, but without pressure or judgment, you can opt into the 'regular' menu as well. You can lie on the beach, or book an island excursion – or head to the wellness clinic. There, you can deep dive into medically-supported treatment, choose more gentle and holistic healing, or give yourself a fitness boost. You can enjoy the hotel's infinity pool, or a private pool villa. The choice is always yours.

Rooms

While some resorts are so good at helping you relax that they make it impossible to work while you're there (even if you need or want to), this place doesn't ask you to choose: the rooms and villas here all come with a functional and well-thought desk space. Beds are comfortable, bathrooms are large and spa-like, and features like terrazzo soaking tubs, large balconies, private plunge pools, and outdoor tubs (depending on the room type), turn each one into a haven for kicking back and enjoying you-time as you please.

Facilities

As a brand that began with its spa offering, it's little surprise that the Anantara Spa here is excellent, as are its fitness facilities (which include a boxing ring, Muay Thai gear and coaches, and a full functional fitness area) – but its Layan Life space is a revelation. Using a combination of holistic alternative therapies and medically-supported treatments, it offers everything from IV drips, diagnostic check-ups, and 3D body scans to physiotherapy massages, Traditional Thai Medicine, and more. Dining is another highlight: from Dara (that offers stargazing experiences alongside exceptional fine Thai cuisine) to trendy global Japanese brand Zuma, and melt-in-your-mouth steak at Age, the tasty wellness menu, and an extensive breakfast selection, the dining options (including in-villa meals and cooking classes) are worth a visit alone. **BT**

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The resort even has a helipad – and its own farm area, where it grows herbs, vegetables and mushrooms (and produces fresh eggs) to help supply its kitchens with as many locally-sourced, high-quality ingredients as possible

VERDICT

A resort that has it all, does it very well, and will make you want to return.

BEST FOR

A nurturing wellness retreat that will feed your soul as well as your body.

DON'T MISS

The rooftop telescope, astrology wheel, and zodiac-themed cocktails (as well as the Massaman curry) at Dara restaurant

PRICE

A premier room starts from Dhs1,330 a night; a pool villa from Dhs2,042 a night; and a three-night Thai medicine retreat programme from Dhs4,595.

CONTACT

168 Moo 6, Layan Beach Soi 4
Cherngtalay, Thalang District, Phuket
83110, Thailand; +66 76 317 200;
anantara.com or layanlifephuket.com

IMAGES **ANANTARA LAYAN PHUKET RESORT**

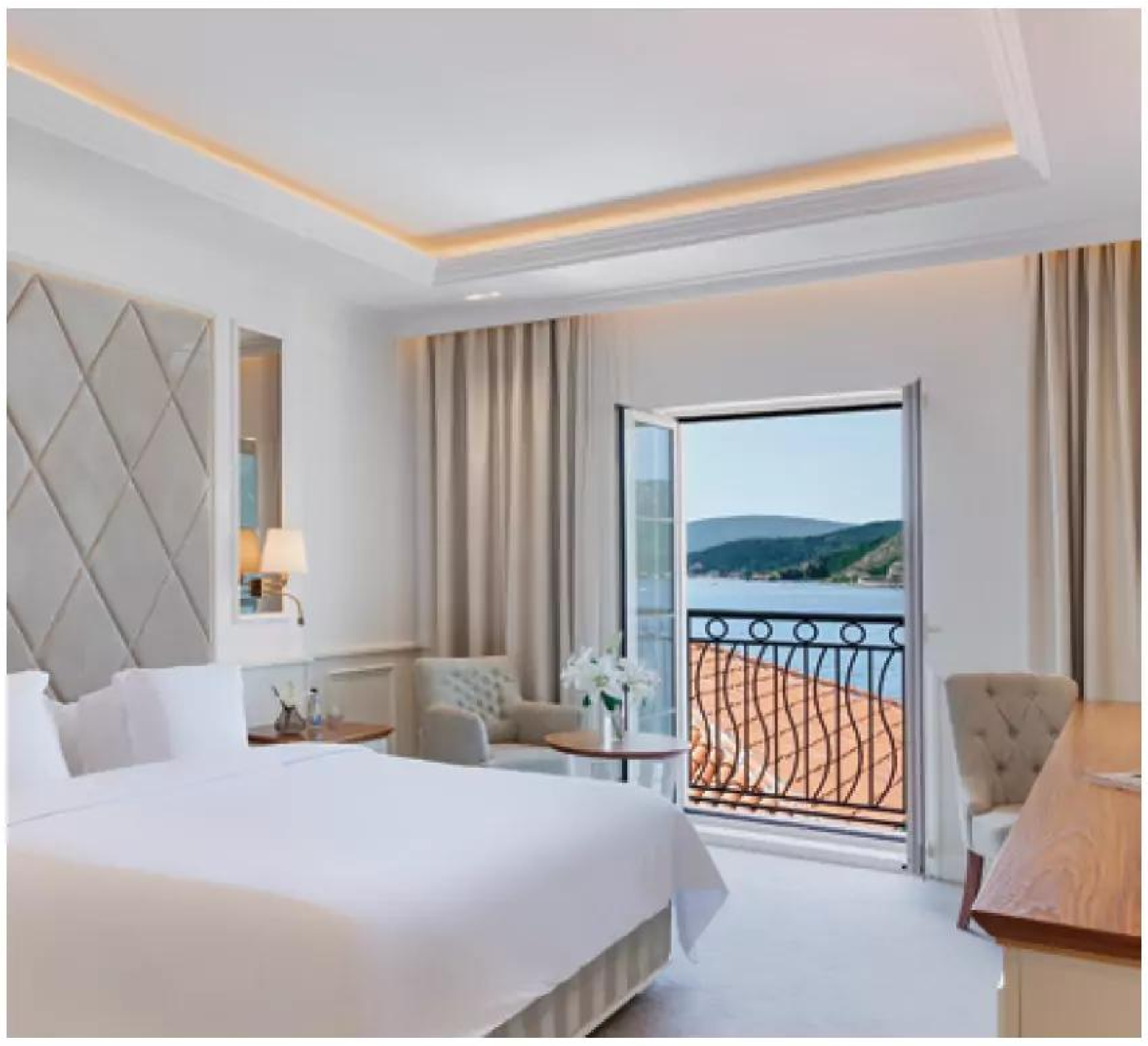
WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

Heritage Grand Perast by Rixos

An elegant hotel located in a historic palace, with splendid views fit for royalty

What's it like?
Found in the heart of Perast – an idyllic seafront town in an especially peaceful part of Montenegro's Bay of Kotor – this hotel is located inside an 18th century palace. Perast was once the home of many noble families, with at least 16 palaces and 19 churches located within its minute realm – you can walk across the entire town's 1.5-2km distance within 20-30 minutes. The hotel is found within Smekja Palace, which is the largest palace in Perast. The property has honoured the grand past of the monument and its name by maintaining as much of its original feel as possible, with its stone walls, coat-of-arms, and gorgeous terrace making you feel like you've stepped back in time. This isn't a property that defines luxury as something ostentatious or loud, but rather, ties its key values to its regal elegance, historical significance, and sense of exclusivity. For a tranquil stay in a literal palace in one of the most treasured spots in a coveted bay, it's the grandest choice in town.

Rooms
The hotel has 130 rooms spread across four buildings on the palace grounds. They're incredibly comfortable, with quality beds and high-quality sheets. Their light, airy colours complement the breezy sense of its seaside location, but despite their neutral tones and clean feel, they never feel stark or austere due to the warm and plentiful lighting, and cozy accents, such as the velvety, jewel-toned throw blankets you'll find at the foot of the bed (that will encourage you to curl up with a good book – a popular pastime here). Some rooms come with a garden view, but if you'd like to wake up feeling like you're in a coastal fairytale, opt for a sea view pick: the premium Sea View Suites, have wrought-iron balconies and terrace doors that open up onto dramatic views of the bay.



Facilities
The hotel has a pool bar and three restaurants – a panoramic terrace, the piazza restaurant, and Riva restaurant, with the latter two connected. The area is known for its seafood, and the Mediterranean cuisine, grilled dishes, and pasta options are standouts – but take note of opening hours, since last orders are taken by 8:30pm. Each evening, you'll find live music at the piazza – it's a beautiful way to wile away the hours. There are more fantastic waterfront dining options next door, including Restaurant Conte and Fish Restaurant Djardin, plus the Moritz Eitz and Cattarissimo gelato shops a short walk away. On sunny days, the hotel also has a gelato cart at its piazza. It's within easy walking distance of Perast's key sights, such as the Perast Museum and Saint Nicholas' Church – and the hotel can call you a taxi if you'd like to visit the town of Kotor, 20 minutes away. To travel by water, the hotel has its own dock that a small boat hire can pick you up from directly – right in front of its petite but lovely infinity pool and deck. The hotel can secure excursions for you, with a list of choices available in its in-room book. Don't miss a peek at the spa, open from 8am to 8pm, with massages, facials, an indoor pool, and sauna and steam room. **BT**

GOOD -TO- KNOW

Perast becomes pedestrian-only at certain times of day or in specific seasons. The hotel has golf buggies that will pick you up from the start or end of town and take you directly to the property, whether you're coming to or from the airport, or trying to get a taxi to elsewhere.

VERDICT

A unique property that isn't just a chance to experience coastal luxury, but also immerse yourself in history.

BEST FOR

The discerning guest that values real elegance, history, and serenity.

DON'T MISS

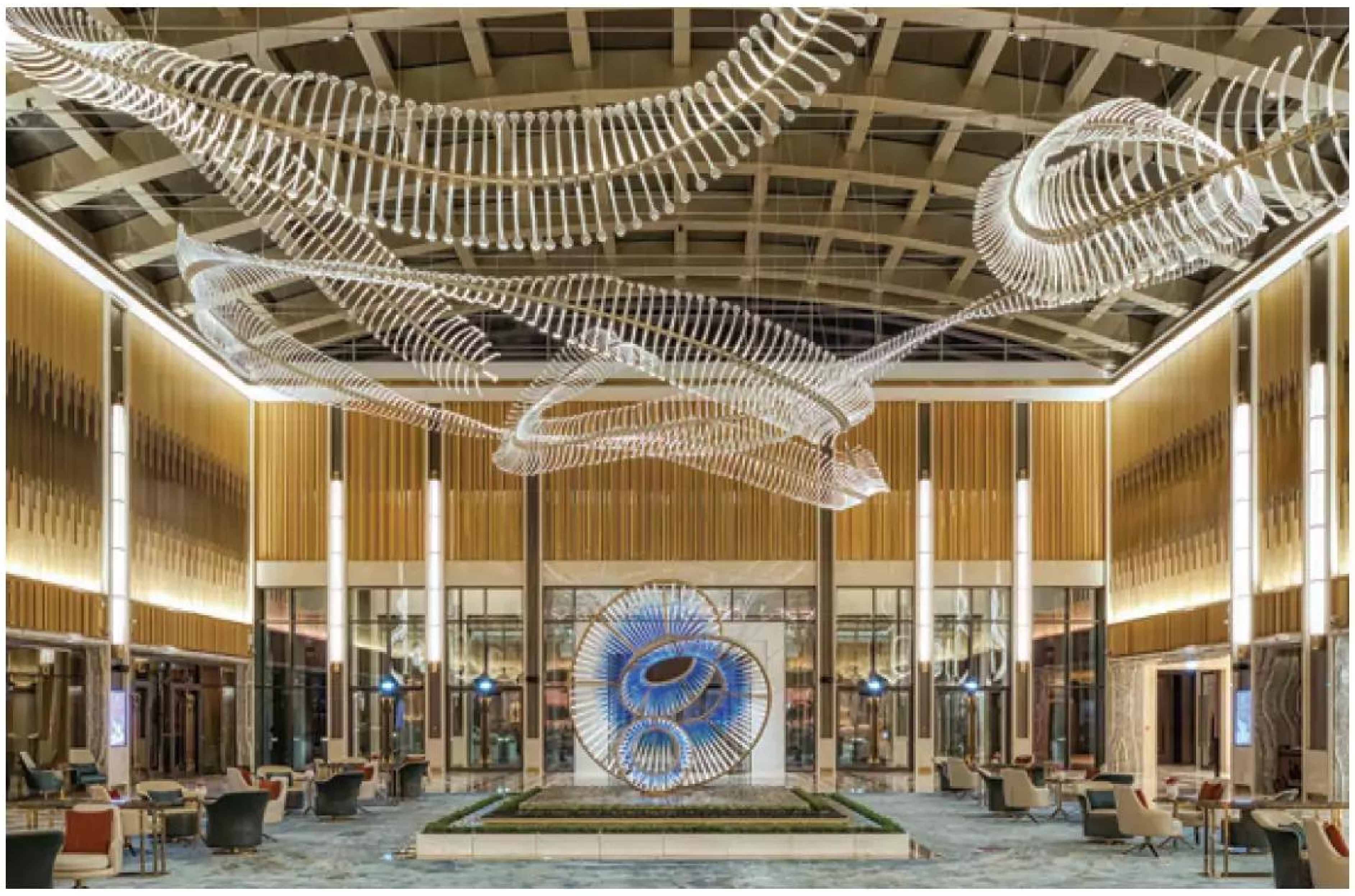
A waterborne excursion to the iconic Our Lady of the Rocks islet (which you can see from the hotel's epic views) and its museum, plus the Blue Caves.

PRICE
Internet rates for July start from Dhs1,416 for a Perast Superior room, or Dhs2,388 for a Sea View suite.

CONTACT
Marka Martinovica, Perast 85336, Montenegro; +382 32 311 400; hotelheritagegrandperast.com

IMAGES HERITAGE GRAND PERAST BY RIXOS

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA



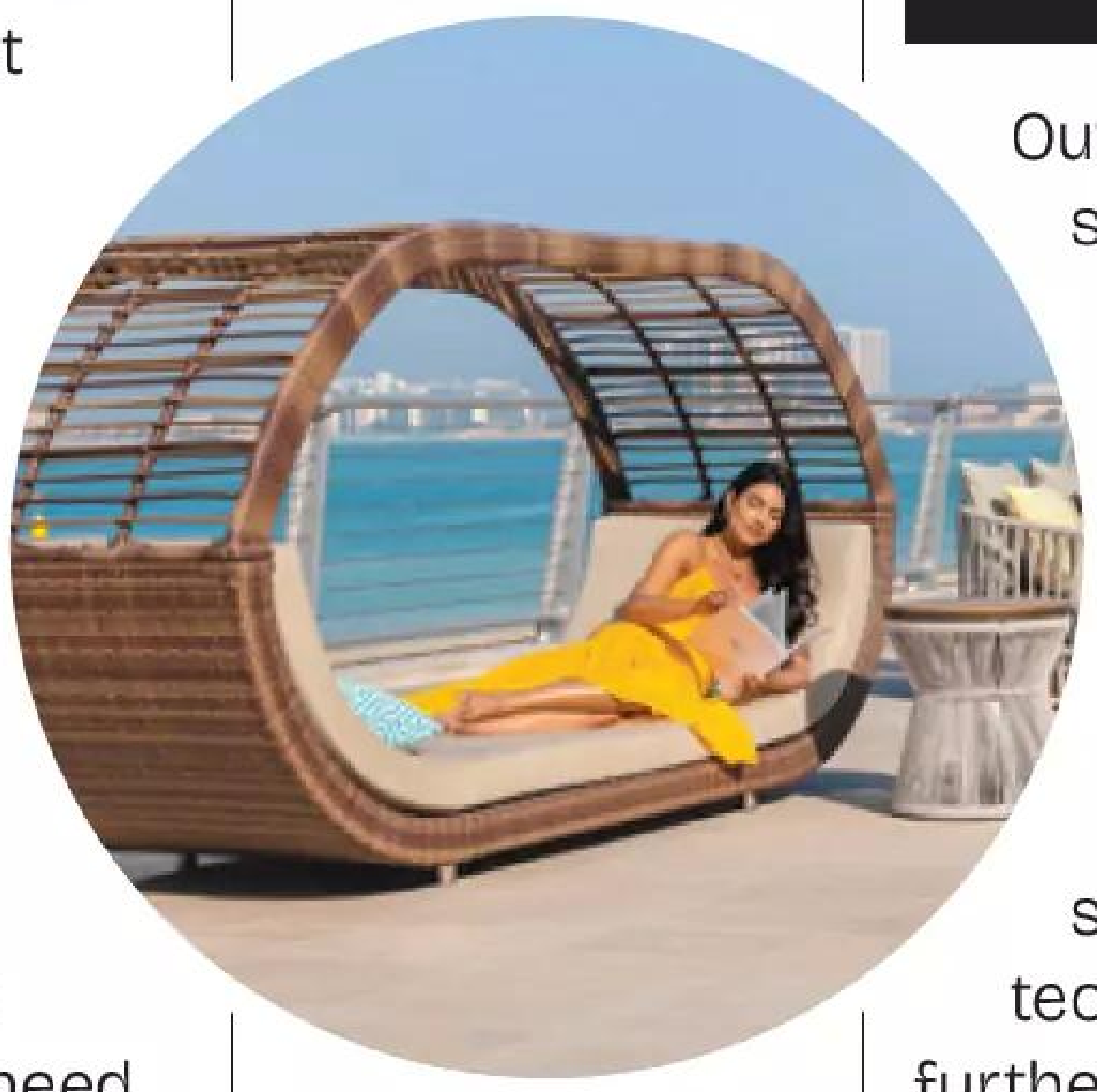
Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, The Palm, Dubai

A relaxing and indulgent retreat that truly lives up to the sense of the word

What's it like?
First opened in 2022 as Dubai's third Taj property (following its Business Bay and Jumeirah Lake Towers locations), as one of the Taj brand's Exotica resorts, this full-service setting focuses on giving its guests an immersive stay that combines a sense of luxury with the chance to enjoy exotic experiences and a distinctive, scenic setting. The interiors are elegant and striking, paying homage to the marine life of its beachfront location in the most sophisticated way – without ever losing sight of the brand's Indian heritage. Upon entering its lobby, you'll be welcomed with a seashell necklace, as well as the sight of a grand glass structure that resembles an infinity loop and a fishbone at once. The carpets, from its ground floor to the hallways between the rooms, look like the ocean viewed from above, while open-faced crystal-filled rocks will help you find your way through the maze-like corridors without the need for blaring signs that ruin its serene feel. Despite the fact that it is an enormous property, it never feels loud or splashy, and cleverly uses its design to make each space feel intimate and quiet in its own way. There's plenty of seating everywhere, ensuring that you'll never be left wanting for comfort or a place to pause and rest. Adding to the overall sense of cheer and ease is a custom jasmine and rose fragrance wafting throughout, and its impeccable service, provided by staff that doesn't just smile, but sincerely wants you to treat you with great hospitality. They'll make you feel like you're being welcomed into a friend's palatial home.

Rooms
There are 258 rooms and 67 suites spread across six floors. The suites all boast expansive balconies, and each room is spacious, with high ceilings and plush bedding atop posturpedic mattresses. If you need to work, a generously-sized desk with a genuinely comfortable chair is available. In the bathrooms, you'll find Graff amenities, and no shortage of towels or products. For a touch of extra luxury, book yourself into the Palm Sea View Suite with Open Jacuzzi, where you'll find a large spa bath looking directly over the pool and the skyline of the Palm's waters.

Facilities
There's a large pool (the longest one on the Palm Jumeirah's East Crescent) and private strip of beach right in the heart of this sprawling property. Outside of the pool bar, there are six other dining options. Roaring Rabbit is an excellent choice for hearty and wholesome family-friendly pub grub, while Varq is not to be missed for Indian fine dining that will tantalise your tastebuds with an explosion of flavours and spices, and masterful cooking techniques. If you need to unwind further, the award-winning J Wellness Circle offers spa treatments, beauty treatments, and health and fitness facilities. Don't miss the Indian and holistic healing options. **BT**



GOOD-TO-KNOW

The resort offers all-inclusive packages, including half- and full-board options. For business needs, the hotel has eight meeting rooms, each able to host 12-40 people, and two ballrooms (one of which can hold 500 people, and the other up to 220). Small, private meetings can also be held in the Taj Club Lounge - where every work station offers software that automatically deletes all personal data the moment you log off, for safety.

VERDICT

A gem on the Palm Jumeirah and in Dubai's overall resort scene, that treats every guest like royalty.

BEST FOR

A indulgent stay that will help you truly relax and enjoy yourself without stress, lifted by exceptional service.

DON'T MISS

Dinner at Varq, the oustanding fine dining Indian restaurant that includes seasonal offerings on its menu.

PRICE
Internet rates for July start from Dhs460 for a Luxury King Bed Room, Dhs1,046 for a Luxury Sea View Suite with Club Lounge Access, or Dhs2,540 for a Grand Luxury Sea View Suite with Open Jacuzzi (without breakfast).

CONTACT
Palm Jumeirah - East Crescent - The Palm Jumeirah - Dubai; +971 4 275 4444; exoticadubai.tajhotels.com

IMAGES TAJ EXOTICA RESORT & SPA, THE PALM, DUBAI

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

Mausam Restaurant

Mouthwatering tandoori grills and high-quality Indian cuisine that'll take you on a journey

What's it like?
This recently-opened restaurant has arrived with a splash in the part of Dubai Mall that's close to its multi-story waterfall featuring the silver figures of divers. Despite being in a mall, the moment you step inside, the hustle and bustle melts away. Rich, warm-toned interiors and golden lighting make it feel rather luxurious, while the modern vibe of its decor keeps it fresh. The restaurant's name means "seasons" in the Hindi language, and this is reflected across its menu, where you'll find dishes that use techniques and flavours that are eaten across all of India and through all of its seasons. There are regular open tables and booth-style seating on the inside, as well as some alfresco options including terrace tables and couch-like lounging areas. While the restaurant's deck offers a spectacular view of the Burj Khalifa, it's the food here that's truly the star of the show.

GOOD-TO-KNOW

As a Dubai Mall-based restaurant, it doesn't serve alcoholic beverages - but it has an extensive list of mocktails, juices, and other drinks.

Food and drink
You'll eat with your eyes before you enjoy it with your taste buds: each dish is presented with plenty of care for its aesthetic flair. Attention to detail includes edible flowers, gold leaf, and gorgeous silverware and serving platters, but it's not just pretty to look at – the food here is absolutely delicious, too. The menu is surprisingly extensive, making it hard to choose at times – but with the portion sizes being reasonable, you can easily share a few different options to get a taste (or still feel satisfied if you stick with one). The Samosa Chole – vegetable samosa with a white pea curry, mint chutney, and sweet curd served extra-crispy, in a desconstructed format - is an explosion of flavour and texture. For vegetarians, the Kasturi Bharwan Khumb will offer the taste of spiced brown mushrooms as you're never had them before. You can choose a fresh Kachumber Salad or hydrophonic greens for some freshness, or delve into meaty magic with the Gosht Pasillian – juicy lamb chops made with tamarind BBQ sauce, chilli, malt vinegar, and pepper. Its classic Butter Chicken is elevated through the richness of its gravy and the tenderness of its chicken, while rich curries including gold leaf-flecked lamb shank and seafood, like coconut-laced prawns, will have you mopping up every last drop of sauce with the bread. As for the bread? Warm, soft, flakey, made fresh in the oven. They also have biryanis, soups, and rich, velvety dals. Wash it down with fresh juices (from local brand Barakat) and a sweet treat like cool kulfi or warm gulab jamun.

Service
Our friendly server was very sincere and helpful, making some excellent suggestions on what to try and showcasing real passion for the dishes. From the service to the food, this is no ordinary mall restaurant. **BT**

VERDICT

A fantastic new addition to Dubai's dining scene. In a city with a seemingly endless amount of options for Indian cuisine, this one is a real standout, with a thoughtfully-curated menu of items prepared with love and expertise, that will keep you coming back.

HOURS

10am to midnight daily

CONTACT

+971 4 438 4001; info.mausam@emaar.ae

DRESS CODE

Smart Casual

HOT TIPS

Don't miss the view of the Burj Khalifa from the restaurant's terrace – it offers a prime spot for seeing its laser light shows.

IMAGES **MAUSAM; YI-HWA HANNA**

POSTCARD

Performance meets elegance

THIS POWERFUL, SLEEK MACHINE is the SAY 52 – a 52-foot high-performance carbon fibre sportsboat built by SAY Carbon Yachts, a German manufacturer renowned for its luxury yachts. The SAY 52's lightweight construction is complemented by a unique wave-cutting bow design, and is powered by twin Volvo Penta engines (with either V8 or D6 options available) or an optional electric hybrid system. All of this contributes to its impressive speed and efficiency, with top speeds reaching 45 knots. Weighing only 7.5 tonnes, it consumes just 45l of fuel per hour, at an average cruising speed of 20 knots. The craft's comfort isn't just experienced through how smooth it is when it travels fast – it also offers plenty of space, including a spacious deck layout that encourages relaxation and easy entertaining alongside its clean, modern, minimalist aesthetic. It can accommodate up to four guests, making it ideal for day trips and weekends alike. **BT**

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